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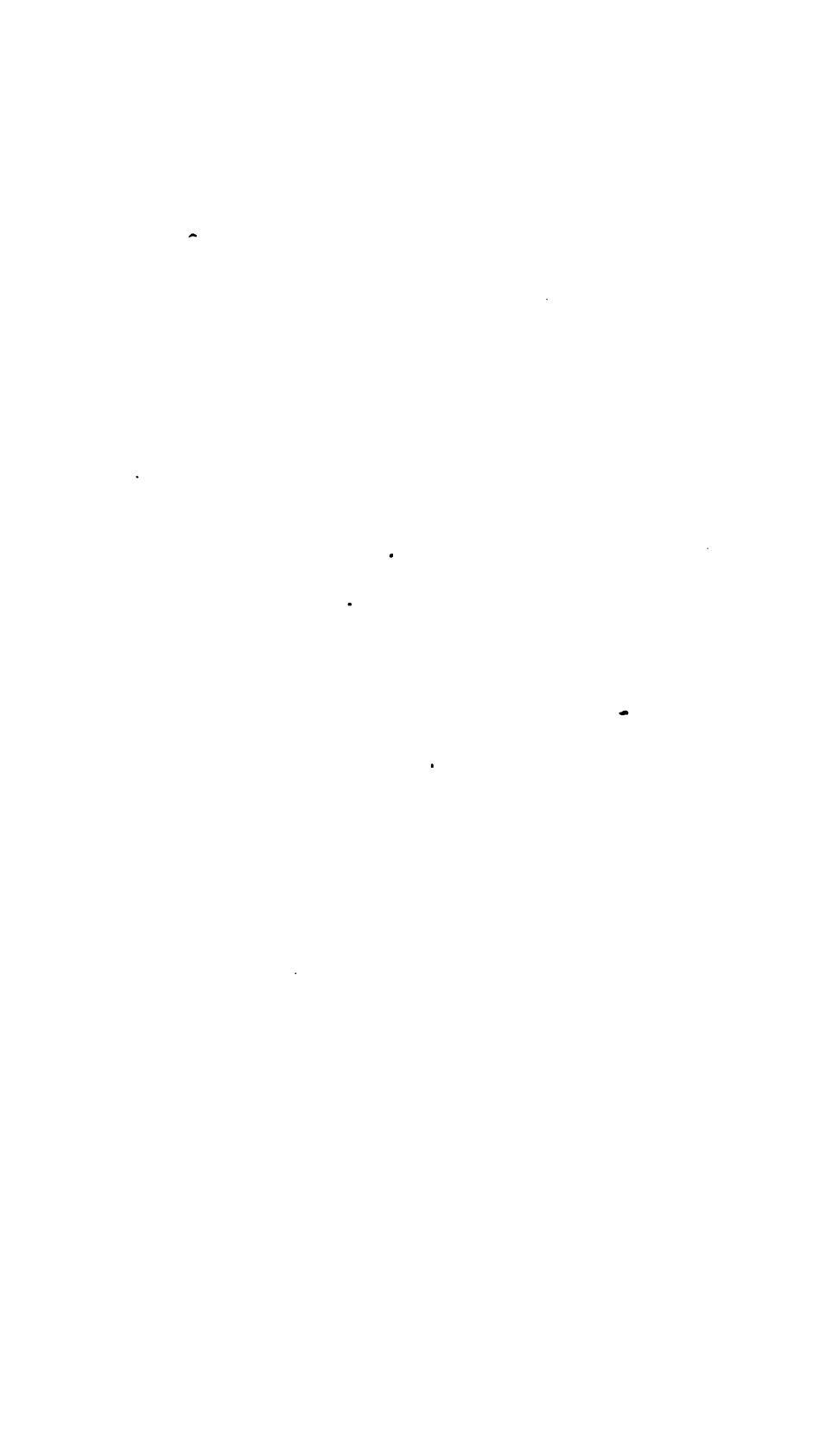
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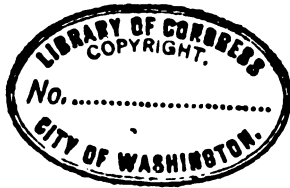
OR

THE MYSTERY OF THE WESTERVELTS.

BY

J. W. DE FOREST,

AUTHOR OF "ORIENTAL ACQUAINTANCE," "EUROPEAN ACQUAINTANCE,"
ETC., ETC.



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SEACLIFF.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE OF SEACLIFF.

IT was exactly a year since I had said good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Westervelt, and to the two Misses Westervelt, in Switzerland.

I had left them on the summit of the Righi at sunrise, leaning over the awful outlying brink of the alp, and looking downward upon an ocean of clouds dazzling-white, surging, billowy, and cleft in fleecy chasms, through which appeared the gleam of many lakes, and the stony or snowy brows of many mountains. Around us sightseers from various lands were clustered in silent companies, earnest in gaze and reverently wonder-stricken. A revelation, like that of an immaculate Righi sunrise, is not received lightly by the majority of intelligent creatures, nor passes away without making memorable some of those who stand with us on the mount and behold the glory. Now, as I drove up to the country-house of the Westervelts, I called to mind distinctly the grouping of their four figures on the bald, breezy Swiss summit. The painting was so clear before me that I half glanced around to see the infinite alpine mist, the shadowy valleys, the scamed and gray precipices, the far-off flash of glaciers, the solemn, unconquerable, cruel snows of the everlasting mountain

heads. There was nought but green New England hillocks, the white dwelling half hidden by trees, and beyond it a shimmer of sunny sea.

The house stood in one of the southwesterly townships of Connecticut, crowning a bluff which fronted sharply upon the narrow arm of ocean, called Long Island Sound. The grounds, varied and full of character by Nature's gift, gayly toned with bright hillocks and little dells of shadow, or wrought into stronger relief of ledge and leafage, were well adapted to the modern style of landscape gardening after which they had lately been remodelled. No reflection was there here of Versailles Vandalism, laid out stiff and stark by grim undertaker Le Notre. The general appearance of the two or three acres was already agreeable and tending toward the picturesque, although no one feature of the landscape was surprising or in the least suggestive of alpine sublimities. The dwelling itself was far from worthy of an environment so tasteful. The work doubtless of some predecessor to the present proprietor, it bespoke those dark ages of American country architecture previous to Downing, and seemed to assert, with all the force of its snobbish individuality, that it had no sympathy with the natural graces which surrounded it. It was one of those mock Parthenons, beloved of our fathers thirty years ago; a temple of brick and mortar, coated over with stucco veined and lined in shabby imitation of marble; breaking out toward the south in a staring, shameless pediment, and Ionic columns which shaded Yankee windows; and flanked on either side by modern wings, built solely for convenience, in abrupt disregard of the sham classicism of the edifice. On each side of the main body there was a slight one-story veranda, running forward from the wing and joining the heavy front portico. Altogether the building reminded me of a clumsy translation from the Greek, eked out with modern supplement, appendix, and commentaries. Partial amends were made for these absurdities by the beautiful outlook of the house, standing as it did

on a prominent turfy hillock, and facing the mid-day sun, the shining sheet of the Sound, and, far away, the green and yellow belts of the Long Island shore.

In approaching from the neighboring village I had left the highway and trotted my hired buggy along the slowly ascending curve of a private road which stopped at the eastern gate of the grounds. Tying my horse at a post, under shelter of a thicket of trimmed cedars, I walked up a broad, winding path to the make-believe majesty of the portico. The door was open, giving me a glance down a narrow hall which ran through the mansion. That heavy shouldered, long armed, brief nosed Hibernian maiden, who ministers so generally to the domestic comfort or discomfort of New England family life, was passing at the moment on some errand of cleanliness, made manifest by her dustpan and duster. Handing her my card, with a request to see the ladies, I stepped flurriedly into the untenanted parlor and waited. Now was the time for an elfin mob of reminiscences and anticipations, doubts and hopes, to assail me. Happily for human manners and morals, a certain amount of diffidence comes to most persons by birthright, and an average man must see a great deal of the world before he can dissipate his entire legacy of bashfulness. It is a circumstance that we all complain of at times; but we may feel sure that if it were not for the best, it would not be so. How many blunders, how many exhibitions of bad taste, how much impertinence and brutality, how many ruinous follies and crimes even, are we saved from in our years of youthful indiscretion by a decent hamper of youthful diffidence. Show me a youngster with a brow unblushing, and I will show you one of the devil's adopted children. Notwithstanding a city breeding, flirtations with boarding-school belles, and two years of pleasuring in Europe, I had not yet, at the age of twenty-four, turned all my native gold of modesty into current social brass, and therefore my heart beat sensibly under its glossy shirt-bosom, as I listened for the advance of female drapery along the flooring of

the hall. The Misses Westervelt were beautiful girls; it was a matter of wide dispute which was the most beautiful; as the Bernesque poets express it, each was fairer than the other. My susceptible southern friend, Boynton, used to reproach me with being an unloving man, incapable of earnest affection for woman, and unworthy of what he, in his sentimental way, styled the highest, purest duty and privilege of manhood—marriage. Boynton was engaged himself; on probation for the time being, and, as a matter of course, mightily enamored; his face set toward the altar, like Christian's toward the Holy City. Greatly was I affected by the utterances of his enthusiasm, notwithstanding the somewhat ludicrous earnestness of his pale lovelorn face, and the chanting southern accent with which he enunciated his prose poetry. To the depths of my soul I felt his reproach, and wished that it were false, while I feared that it was true. But Boynton would have been inclined to absolve me from that bitter accusation of emotional barrenness, had he known the tremors with which I used to meet the Misses Westervelt, one or both of them, I could not for a long time tell which. American women charm American men easily at home, but still more easily in a foreign land. Many are the love-affairs which blossom in Europe, to ripen into marriage in America. All along the course of the grand tour, in every mouldering ruin, in every famed cathedral, by every irised cascade, on every alpine summit, are there invisible altars to Hymen, where incipient husbands have bowed, and vowed, and sacrificed.

Hat in hand, I stood for two or three minutes by the front windows; and then, as no one came, I paced slowly to the other end of the room, led on by a straggling line of pictures. There was a landscape of no significance; a modern half-length, clearly a portrait; a Madonna which looked like a Carlo Dolci; and a fair copy of Guido's terrible Beatrice Cenci. Beautiful that pale calm face is, beyond the beauty of Grecian goddesses, but terrible also, in its grief that is un-

utterable, its remorse that is yet not penitence, and its despair that is as placid as sleep. As I looked, I was suddenly impressed with a likeness in the woful girlish countenance to the younger Miss Westervelt. The discovery was a doubly noticeable one, because it explained a mystery. Very often, as I sat, or walked, or rode by the side of Genevieve, particularly when the moonlight fell on her features, making them paler and more pensive than their wont, the idea had crossed me that, somewhere or other, at some important moment, in some agitating circumstance, I had seen and watched her with the profoundest pity and sympathy. The feeling was a vivid one, although I could not connect it with anything in my memory; it made me regard her with an interest which I should not otherwise have accorded to a precocious girl of sixteen; it wrought an atmosphere of romance around her, and seemed to connect her, not only with my past, but with my future; it was the only thing, perhaps, which withheld me from sacrificing all my attention and admiration to the sweet, Madonna-like face and being of her sister Mary. The illusion was cornered now, and robbed of the wings of mystery with which it had haunted me. It retreated within the square, gilded prison of the picture-frame, resolved itself into the well-known features of the Beatrice, and became a mere interesting fact without a particle of poetic power. "Ah, Genevieve!" whispered I to myself, "you have lost by it."

The interest of this reverie held me so close, that for a while I did not notice a murmur of conversation which arose in a back room connecting by a door with the end of the parlor where I stood. I was recalled to myself by hearing a man's voice utter these strange words: "I tell you I have no pity!"

I turned and stared at the door with just that simple surprise which most mortals would have felt under the circumstances. The voice was a full, fine and commanding one, although muffled by the panels, and deepened by anger into an utterance much like that of one of those stage ruffians whom

we Americans call actors. Good heavens! thought I, what unmerciful individual is that? Can Mr. Westervelt be lecturing his wife in such a fierce fashion? I never thought him a hard husband. But perhaps he is correcting one of the Misses Westervelt. Nonsense! he is probably admonishing a thievish servant.

While I stood dumfounded, the answer to the threat came; an answer in womanish tones, pleading and tearful, though I distinguished no words. Stifled and stern the masculine utterance retorted: "Quick then! or I will expose you and myself together!"

What a hypocritical old ruffian! I meditated. Is it possible that quiet, creamy Mr. Westervelt talks in that style to women? Well, I must get away from here;—I shall have the air of an eavesdropper.

I turned hurriedly, and set off on tiptoe for the opposite end of the deep parlor. Dumas's heroes, pinks of courtesy and spotless lilies of chivalry as he represents them, are never ashamed to gain information by the frailty of a wainscot, or to dive into family secrets through a keyhole; but our American education is stupid compared with the Parisian, and, instead of rejoicing in my discovery, I felt horribly annoyed. It was clear that my entrance, unheralded as it was by the door-bell, had not become known to the household at large; and that some members of it, supposing this back room to be for the present a place of the strictest privacy, had repaired thither to fight out an old quarrel. What if they should come in upon me and discover in my face that I had been an ear-witness of their squabbles! I felt that I should need all the refined brass of Dumas's shabby gentlemen, to be equal to such an emergency. I was still squeaking across the room on my patent-leather toes, when I heard a scuffling behind the door, followed in quick succession by a click of the lock, a creak of the hinge, a lusty jostle of woman's ruiment and a stifled exclamation as of surprise and alarm. Instinctively, and altogether against my very honor-

able intentions, I looked backward over my shoulder. No face was visible, but I caught a glimpse of a plaid silk of dead-leaf colors disappearing from the opening, as its wearer retreated and hurriedly pulled to the door. The voices hushed their muffled altercation, and the mysterious threatener had evidently concluded not to expose himself just at present.

“What a reception!” I muttered. “Is nobody coming, so that I can make my compliments and be off? I wonder if I shall see the Misses Westervelt at all. I wonder if either of them will wear a plaid silk of dead-leaf colors. I wonder what is the matter in the family. I wouldn’t marry into it for a million.”





CHAPTER II.

THE PEOPLE OF SEACLIFF.

IN another minute it became clear that I was about to be received. I heard, floating down the stairway, that perfumed rush and rustle which breathes from the robes of woman,—that voice of lace and satin which has caused my heart and the heart of every properly constituted man to beat so often and so violently,—that eerie silken whisper which makes us start and look up even when the siren, who causes it, passes our lonely rooms unseen, through sombre hotel entries.

Preparing my face for a smile, and clearing my throat for the salaams, I awaited the Misses Westervelt. I had already forgotten the shocking dialogue of the mysterious boudoir; the descending enchantment had driven it from my spirit; a new spell was upon me. They entered lightly and gracefully, first Mary and then Genevieve.

“I am glad to see you again, Mr. Fitz Hugh,” said Mary, in her sweet quiet way, as though the mild Madonna of Carlo Dolci had spoken. “We were out in the garden tending our flowers, or we shouldn’t have made you wait so long. You must excuse Mamma, she has a headache, and can only send her compliments.”

She gave me her hand frankly, and then waved the rosy-white fingers toward a chair. In the mean time Genevieve had only saluted me with a reserved little bow, and just

enough of a smile to show me how sharply, delicately cut were her aristocratic and somewhat haughty lips.

"Thank you, Miss Westervelt," said I, "This is more agreeable to me than the Righi. That was a parting, and this is a meeting."

I was not afraid, it will be seen, to pay a bold compliment to the Misses Westervelt. The truth is, that I felt as if I knew them well, because I had travelled several weeks with them; for a month's journey in company gives a closer acquaintance than a year of ordinary intercourse. In society the mass of people have few startling topics in common, and still fewer interests; but among heroic ruins, solemnizing cathedrals, revered works of art and life-pictures of strange peoples, sensations rapidly sympathize, and thoughts become charmingly interchangeable. This is not all the explanation, but this is enough for the present purpose.

"Oh, but the Righi!" said she. "Just think again of the Righi before you prefer our parlor to it. We had a carpet of clouds, you know, instead of a Brussels. And then the lakes, the awful white mountains, the blinding glaciers, the"—she checked herself with a little blush at her own enthusiasm.

"Very true," said I; "but I bring all those things with me; I have them in my mind's eye at this moment; they got into the buggy with me at my hotel. The mere thought of calling on my old friends, summoned up the Righi. By the way, I see that you have some mementos of Europe here."

"The pictures? Oh, yes, we couldn't resist the temptation of buying a copy or two. We chose one Carlo Dolci, you see, in spite of Ruskin."

"But they are not all copies, are they?" I asked. "There is one, I see, that resembles both of you slightly. Is it meant for a portrait of either of you?"

"It is my mother's portrait," replied Mary, gravely, with a glance at the half-length over the mantel. "It was taken the year she was married."

"Not the present Mrs. Westervelt, you understand, Mr. Fitz Hugh," said Genevieve, now speaking for the first time. "You know, or shall know, that our present mamma is only a step-mamma."

"I am aware,—I remember," responded I, passing hastily over the thorny subject of step-motherhood. "Mrs. Westervelt is a very charming lady."

"She charms papa, I believe," said Genevieve, coolly,—
"and some other people."

I was quite used to Genevieve's little satirical ways, and only smiled at a speech which I considered more flippant than malicious. Miss Westervelt took the affair more seriously, and gave her sister a beseeching glance of caution; but the latter had evidently been stirred up to bitterness by some recent development of step-maternity; and so, paying no attention to the silent admonition, she went on in her tirade with a brisk sparkling energy, like the first flurry of a lighted lucifer. "There is one experience, Mr. Fitz Hugh, that you men never can appreciate, and that is the happiness of a young lady,—say a couple of young ladies,—over whose welfare and prospects broods the love of a step-mother. You are not so constantly in the nest as we are; besides, you can struggle out of the step-feathers, if you don't find them agreeable; you can choose your own element, like ducklings who have been hatched by a hen. Mr. Fitz Hugh, did you ever fancy the condition of a chicken gathered under the motherly quills of a porcupine? I have, and I assure you that I think it is no laughing matter."

"Hush, Genevieve!" said Mary. "Mr. Fitz Hugh doesn't understand your extravaganzas; and, if he does, I hope he will be kind enough not to notice them."

"I am as discreet as a tomb, as a pyramid," replied I. "In fact I understand nothing, and confess that Miss Genevieve has completely mystified me."

I had already reverted in thought to the plaid silk of dead leaf colors, and for the first time I glanced at the dresses of

the young ladies to see their tint and fashion. I suspected that Genevieve had been the misused female of the back boudoir, and that papa had threatened vengeance upon her for thwarting the authority or happiness of step-mamma, only I could detect no sort of sense in that denunciation of universal exposure. Neither she nor her sister wore anything like a plaid, not even in the shape of a checked scarf or ribbon. Both were dressed as French ladies dress, and as most women who trust their own taste dress, in broad sheets of plain color, contrasting only in masses and unbroken by any frivolous deformities of crossings, stripings, prismatic blotchings or kaleidoscope patterns. To be more particular, Mary wore a skirt of green silk, Genevieve a skirt of blue silk, and both had black silk bodices. The auburn locks of the elder sister, and the flaxen blonde ones of the younger were alike unadorned, except by their own luxurious braidings and wavy droopings. Still suspecting that the spirited and satirical junior of the couple had been the oppressed heroine of the boudoir scene, I began to ponder whether she had had time, in the interval between that and her appearance in the parlor, to change her attire. I am not ashamed to confess that in those days I was too ignorant of the mysteries of the female toilet to decide the question. I have learned better since; but I still declare that a man is unlucky who has no sisters; that he labors under a serious disadvantage in studying the multitudinous, the ever-present, and ever-fascinating problem of womanhood.

I was getting into a state of distraction which would soon have made me absurd in the eyes of the Misses Westervelt, had not their attention and mine been diverted by a new incident. A trampling of masculine heels in the portico, and then a confident clamor of voices in the hall told the arrival of some persons who apparently felt themselves at home.

"They have come back?" said Mary, glancing at her sister. "Why, they just this moment went out."

"Out at one door, and in at another," replied Genevieve.

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resume Cousin Jule found it too hot; she always finds it hot or too cold. Our cousins the Van Leers," she added, in explanation to me. "Not own cousins, but relatives of Westervelt."

...rum, sounding of trumpets, as it were, and enter the Van Leers. First came a lady of about twenty-seven, medium-sized, walking well, dark-haired, black-eyed, self-confident, and terribly fashionable; a woman of the world most completely, who had seen all the life she could, held etiquette in her fingers' ends, and knew exactly what she was about, at every moment of her modish existence. Then followed two large, strongly-built men, evidently brothers, the one thirty and the other twenty-five. They had the same massive features, the same Bæotian brown eyes, the same enormous chestnut moustaches; both alike, also, were dressed in the latest morning fashion, and laid defiant exterior claim to the character of dandy and man-about-town. The eldest had apparently lost his front hair, so that his naturally low forehead showed a counterfeit loftiness. Lastly appeared a fop-youth of about twenty-two, much shorter and lighter in build than his predecessors, the face of him round and lively, eyes small black and shiny, his step quick and skipping, whole air full of a conceit which was half amusing, half ridiculous. The lady and gentlemen bowed as I was presented, and did not trouble themselves to offer me a remark. The fop-youth skated lightly about the room for a few seconds, like an insect upon water, until, hitting against the side-stool, he forthwith seated himself upon it and thrummed his blood and unprovoked, the *brindisi* of Lucrezia Borgia. His two heavy seniors fell upon a sofa, yawned and laid down the jasper heads of their canes. Had they entered the room in anger, I should have supposed that here were three ladies for the Misses Westervelt, and should accordingly have left the field free to them by paying my compliments and making my departure, but as they were only cousins, I remained in my post and waited for them to disencumber the parlor

They had no such delicate intentions, however; the lady complained to my two pretty hostesses of the dreadful heat; the two men on the sofa threw in a few words concerning a proposed fishing excursion. Altogether they seemed to me under-bred people, whose parvenuity could not be hidden by any cunning of tailors and mantua-makers.

I considered myself an intimate acquaintance of the Misses Westervelt, and therefore did not feel annoyed at being left for a moment to the society of mine own beaver. While the others talked, I busied myself in looking at Genevieve and speculating on her possible connection with the mystery of the boudoir, but after studying her earnestly for two or three minutes, I simply came to the conclusion at last that she was unquestionably a beauty. Her form was small, but very elegant; her features were uncommonly regular, delicate, and *spirituel*; her lip was the most flexible, the most patrician, the haughtiest that I knew; her eyes were blue-gray, but as eloquent in their mute speech as the dark orbs of Rome; and her whole face was refined, although it could not be quite tender, because of a gleam of pride and a sparkle of satire. On the whole, she was a wonder of beauty and expression, considering how small she was, and that she was only seventeen.

Presently my reverie was broken by a remark of the lady cousin, who, it turned out, was wife of the elder Van Leer. "Your father has just about reached New York," she observed.

"Exactly!" struck in the skipping-jack, spinning round on the piano-stool. "Just about having his pocket picked in the Canal-street station." And here he went off in a boastful narrative concerning an adventure of his own with a pick-pocket, in which the gentleman of the swell-mob suffered painful discomfiture, getting his thievish wrist broken by the tremendous gripe of the skipping-jack.

So Mr. Westervelt was not at Seacliff, and had not been there since early morning! Who then, in the name of Blue-

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's wives, was that dreadful man in the back boudoir who so devoid of pity, and so anxious to expose himself? who was the other, the woman, whose very voice seemed to shudder and tremble at his feet, who dared not even weep, and to whose pleadings he returned such harsh answers? The idea crossed my mind that they might have been Mr. and Mrs. Van Leer, playing shuttlecock with the monial doves, in angry forgetfulness that the holy birds came from Paradise. Nothing more likely, thought I, smiling inwardly at the cruel supposition, for I had the common dulity of bachelors concerning the happiness of married life, and in short was an ignoramus of life, as will be often the case in this history.

At that moment a firm masculine step came along the hall to the interior haunts of the dwelling. Here I was about to hang a guess upon, thought I, and assiduously scanned the doorway. Entered the dandy, the diner-out, the hero of Gothamite tailors, the man who drew at sight on the hearts of the unrivalled manager of fancy balls and theatricals, the high priest of Fifth Avenue mysteries, the late Mr. Somerville, Esquire, Attorney at Law. He was a noticeable man in person as well as in manners and character. He must have been thirty-seven at that moment, he had seen dissipation enough to waste the ruddiest cheeks; yet he was as erect, as fresh, as unwrinkled, as vigorous in port as if Father Time had but just brought him to the first full perfection of manhood. Nature seemed to have gifted him with that imperishable beauty, that eternal youth, the ideal of which we see in statues of Grecian gods and heroes. Five feet ten and finely proportioned, he had the features of an Achilles, a clear pale complexion, stern dark eyes, waving glossy black hair and a heavy moustache curled in curl and unsurpassed in blackness. I had observed him in Paris as one of the most perfectly Gallicized Americans that ever trod a boulevard; in London as a primo about-town, indistinguishable to my eyes from the purest

bloods of the English aristocracy; and I had heard of him in Italy as the rival of Russian princes, the conqueror of *comtesse* and *marchesine*. It was not agreeable to find him here at Seacliff, ready perhaps to dispute with me the ownership of any air-castles that I should seek to erect around either or both of the Misses Westervelt.

He walked into the room quietly and gravely, with no effort at effect. Evidently it would be impossible to pick flaws in his manners so long as he chose to keep the polished side of them toward me. I noticed that Genevieve colored and only half glanced at him as he entered, and that Mary introduced him to me with a constrained air which seemed to indicate some stronger feeling than mere youthful embarrassment. Mrs. Van Leer's eyes, on the contrary, flashed with frank gratification, and she beckoned the new-comer to her side with an easy boldness which gave one the idea of relationship, and disagreed strangely with the excited blush that tinted her cheeks. That they were not relatives, and that the lady was simply one of the numberless fascinated ones, I soon discovered. "How are you, Mr. Somerville?—How do you find yourself?—Got rested, my dear feller?" were the salutations of the skipping-jack and the two Bœotian brothers.

"I am really glad to see that you are able to be about," observed Mrs. Van Leer, with a smile that was meant to be charmingly saucy. "How imprudent it was of you to come all the way from New York in one morning! Oh, don't protest that you are well; you hadn't strength enough to go out with us, you know. I do hope that the country air will set you all right again."

The smile and the look with which Somerville listened to these trivialities formed an expression that was deliciously adulatory; it seemed to tell Mrs. Van Leer that he was perfectly entranced with her badinage, and considered it the liveliest, the cleverest, that he had heard in a long time.

"There is a prospect of my improvement," said he. "I have the pleasure of congratulating Mrs. Van Leer on the

beneficent effects of country air. It turns the fairest lily to a rose."

"What a shameless flatterer!" whispered the lady, pretending to shake her ringlets at the compliment; but her very skirts rustled with satisfaction, and her face became more roseate than before.

"Ah, Sis! everybody knows that you hate adulation," maliciously observed the skipping-jack, who, it appeared, was Mrs. Van Leer's brother, and called himself Mr. Frederick William Hunter.

After a while Somerville came over to me, remarking that he remembered having supped with me in Paris. That supper; eaten at the *Maison Dorée* by two dozen Americans, in honor of somebody's election, I perfectly well recollected; nor had I forgotten the presence of Somerville, who that evening dawned on my acquaintance in the character of the prince of good fellows, the greatest of convivialists; but I was surprised and a trifle flattered that my own youthful and very timid assistance on the occasion had made any impression on his memory. I told him so frankly, observing that it was very kind in him thus to distinguish my twenty-fourth part of the festivity. The smile with which he answered this remark was peculiarly winning and gratifying, it seemed to say: "I am charmed that you think so much of my good opinion; let us be friends forever." Then he turned gayly to Mrs. Van Leer, and called on her to acknowledge that here at last was a modest man.

"Every one is modest in your company, Mr. Somerville," was her reply, spoken in a flippant tone, but with a coaxing face.

"By contrast to my own conceit, I suppose," said he, laughingly, but looking fervent thanks for her implied acknowledgment of his crushing superiority. Such was his usual method of receiving a compliment, as I found when I knew him better. He seemed to think so much of it as coming from you,—he had such an air of sticking it proudly in the

most conspicuous button-hole of his memory,—that he left you in the thankfullest frame of mind imaginable, feeling moreover that you could not say or do enough for him in future. It was like offering a lady a bouquet, and seeing her place it in her bosom. In such a case it is the donor who is the obliged person, and it is the recipient who confers a favor.

The conversation soon became general, for Somerville made it so. He tossed off several amusing subjects in succession, started people on the tracks best suited to them, and seduced even the two Van Leer mummies into a delusive show of liveliness. Indeed, the charm of his society did not proceed so much from the wit or wisdom of what he said, as from his tact in tempting you to reply. This, however, I did not then clearly perceive; this I discovered long afterwards, and by dint of much observation; for Somerville was a hard man to find out, because he was so very agreeable. But, clever as he was, and interesting as the whole circle had become under his influence, I could not be diverted from noting his voice and manner, with a view to decide whether he was the man of mysterious exposures. Rapidly I became convinced that the mere suspicion of such a thing did him the harshest, stupidest injustice. His deportment, to speak figuratively, consisted entirely of lines of beauty, undeformed by a single straight mark or angle. His voice was a luxury to hear; mellow, powerful, varied, rhythmical, delicious, and reminding one of the medium notes of a fine organ; very different indeed from the tones of the invisible miscreant of the boudoir, which, muffled as they were by the heavy door, had still reached me hoarse and contorted with passion. Somerville may be a dangerous man to ladies, I concluded; but it is not in his nature to treat them with coarseness and violence.

I turned again to the eldest Van Leer, and, after a very brief trial, brought him in guilty. That he was just the man to bully a woman, became more evident to me every time that

I ran my eye over his flat forehead, unintellectual breadth of face, heavy jaws, pugilistic build, and other indications of a most fleshly nature. To be sure, there seemed to be no sense in his telling his own wife that he would expose her and himself together; but, on the other hand, what intelligence or appropriateness of utterance could you expect from the anger of such a manifest barbarian? Then Mrs. Van Leer wore a check of green and crimson, which might easily be mistaken for an arrangement of dead-leaf colors. Yes, you are the domestic hero, thought I, and if Carlyle were only here, you would have a worshipper.

While I pulled at the tangled threads of my mystery, the conversation skipped on from subject to subject, until Van Leer the elder laid strong hold of it, and with one vigorous haul brought it clear over from a criticism on "Modern Painters," to the consideration of shark-fishing.

"Mrs. Van Leer, is that true?" asked Somerville. "Your husband says that you circumvented a couple of sharks yesterday; hooked them handsomely, and ruined their prospects for man-eating."

"Cousin Jule has always been famous for catching sharks," observed Genevieve quickly.

The remark in itself seemed to be an innocent one enough, but the manner of its utterance was so cynical, biting, and almost vicious, that I glanced around the company to see who had felt the teeth. Somerville was as unclouded and benignant as June sunshine, not even turning his eye on the pungent beauty. The married Van Leer was also perfectly unmoved, but then it was possible that no satire could pierce his dense blubber of stupidity, any more than the fangs of a rattlesnake can penetrate that other gross animal who is such a horror to Jews and such a comfort to Irishmen. The only startled persons were Miss Westervelt, who looked alarmed, and Mrs. Van Leer, who looked angry. Really, Miss Genevieve, thought I, you are a little too sharp; you have no business to go blabbing family misfortunes in that way; you

would not make a nice wife, nor even a pleasant sister-in-law.

"I tell you it's grand sport, shark-fishing is," observed Robert Van Leer, the second of the brothers. "Look here now, Genevieve, you ought to try it. You see, you don't pull him in yourself; you lay out your line, and, when the feller bites, we haul him in for you; and you look on and swing your bonnet. The last feller that Sis caught was a strapper, and gave us the heaviest kind of a long pull and a pull altogether,—didn't he, Henry? Look here now, Mary and Jenny, you go out with us next time, and have some sport, won't you?"

"Are they land-sharks?" asked Genevieve, with a significant crisp of her lips.

"No, no," explained the ponderous youth, without in the least understanding her meaning. "They're a small kind; not man-eaters, you know; not in the least dangerous except to your clothes; you'll have to wear some old clothes, for you'll get all slime. Come, Mary, I say you try it this afternoon, or to-morrow."

"By land-sharks," said I, drawing a bow at a venture, "I suppose Miss Genevieve means mermen; fellows of an amphibious, doubtful, brutal nature, who creep unsuspected into human society and fill it with troubles."

"Exactly," replied Genevieve; "all such outlandish creatures as gamblers, rakes, roués, and hateful people generally."

There was a smile on the faces of Somerville, and the skipping-jack; but the eldest Van Leer showed no signs of remorse, nor even conviction.

"That is a clever fancy," observed Somerville,—"that wicked people are not of human race, but steal in among us from some outcast species, commit their evil deeds, and then, perhaps, return for safety to their own place."

"It makes one think of the story of Branca Doria, in Dante's *Inferno*," said Miss Westervelt.

"Story of who? I say, what's the joke?" inquired Rob-

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quely guessing that somebody had caught an idea he had missed. "Come, Mary, let's hear it."

"Fitz Hugh knows all about it," replied Mary, unwilling to put herself on exhibition as a connoisseur of Danish literature.

"Ancient Doria belonged to the upper ten in Genoa, about a hundred years ago," said I, as Robert's slow eyes turned longingly upon me. "He died one day, very unexpectedly, in the strictest privacy. As no one was by at the time, the devil, name unknown, took the opportunity to enter boldly, deceive the relatives, and get himself into good favor. Of course he became a politician, held office, fell on a crisis, and disgraced the respectable name of Doria in various ways. Those, Mr. Van Leer, are the facts of the case, I believe, although the devil always denied it."

"Did he? Confounded old liar!" observed Robert, with a sneer, as if to laugh at my wit or his own. "Well, where is the story? Not in the Bible, is it? Sounds something like the Bible."

"Dear me! Oh, Robert, you are too comical," laughed Genevieve. "You mustn't suppose that all the devils are in the Bible. Some of them are too modern to be mentioned."

For the first time Somerville glanced a reply to one of the sallies of this captious little lady. A comical look, a sort of grimace it was, which said much to her doubtless, but nothing so strikingly little to me, the uninitiated, who stood only at the door of some grotesque mystery, and vainly tried to recognize human figures traversing the darkness within. On the whole, however, I felt pretty sure that all these sarcastic remarks referred to the domestic tyranny of Mr. Van Leer; I naturally decided that Genevieve was extremely unwise in harping so constantly and sharply on a subject of a delicately private nature. Still, this piquancy gave a decided appearance of character, and made her conver-

sation amusing. A mere acquaintance, a simple caller on the family, like myself, must necessarily forgive it, and indeed be thankful for such a frank and interesting originality, remembering that very few young ladies have the courage to risk their matrimonial prospects for the sake of expressing their feelings. Independent as the girl was, however, she colored under Somerville's glance of humorous comprehension, and, twisting away from him, began a conversation with me. She was wonderfully clever for her age, and amused me for fifteen minutes with odd remarks upon Europe. She thought that the French could never be a truly great people until they stopped lying; it was very much against them, too, that they had so little real respect for women; no nation could be very virtuous or noble, in which women were not listened to; women had more heart than men, and were therefore more refined, more moral; nearly all moral truths were reached through the heart and not through the head; such were the philosophies of precocious Miss Genevieve.

Presently the Van Leers and Somerville went off on a walk along the sea-shore, in order, as Robert expressed it, to start up an appetite for prog; the mention of dinner reminding me that I had made a long call, I rose to depart. Miss Westervelt asked me to stay and dine, in family style; but I had a previous engagement which obliged me to decline.

"Come back in the afternoon, then," said she. "There will be something going on. We shall either ride or fish. You can walk over, if you like,—I know that you are a wonderful walker,—and we will send you back on wheels."

I thanked her, and accepted the invitation, so far at least as regarded the evening. As for dinner, and the immediate post-prandial hours, I had agreed to pass all that time with an old acquaintance whose paternal mansion was one of the chiefest architectural glories of the village where I was now stopping. Does the public incline its million ears to catch the name of that village? Really it pains me to keep my

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r-headed friend and patron in ignorance, but I have counselled not to mention the geographical title of the stable place in question. Villages are so sensitive, you, and so very terrible in their vengeance! For convenience sake, however, I must call it something; and so, hoping no offence, I shall make bold to designate it as Rockford.





CHAPTER III.

THE GAYETIES OF SEACLIFF.

AT eight o'clock of that clear June evening, anxious to meet the pretty Misses Westervelt again, still more anxious, perhaps, to get a satisfactory glimpse of the mystery which haunted their family, I made my second entry into the house of Seacliff. Mrs. Westervelt was in the parlor to receive me, but seeming so worn and depressed that I readily credited her morning excuse of illness. She had changed considerably, and for the worse, since I left her on the brow of the Righi: her complexion had lost colour, her cheeks had sunk a little, her mild hazel eyes had faded; and her whole look had a weary, discouraged expression, which told of either invalidism or sorrow. She still retained, however, that insipid grace, that soft, soulless charm of manner, which made her so fascinating to some people.

“I am glad you came again,” said she. “I thank you for this second call, really,—for I was very sorry not to see you this morning,—disappointed, really. You know, of course, how pleasant it is to meet old travelling companions; they bring up so many recollections, and they seem such intimate friends! But it can't be as great a treat to you as it is to us. You are on the move and amused all the while; and we are so quiet and lonesome in our little country place. Ah! you remember how fond I used to be of balls, and operas, and those things. Well, you will hardly believe it, but I have

got over all that, at least very nearly. I feel a little forsaken now and then at Seacliff, but still I have no desire to go into city life again. Matinées, and parties, and rounds of visits,—I am quite tired of all that, I assure you. What you saw in me abroad was the last flicker of the candle. I am as domestic now as my husband, if not more so. Oh, it will be a long time before *you* can come to this state of feeling, unless you should have had health or meet with some great trouble. Trouble saddens one for a long while. I never have been quite the same person that I was before the death of my poor uncle who adopted me. Oh, you need not try to tell me;—I know all about it by experience;—if people are gay once, they are gay for a good while; but they can be sobered by sickness and misfortune. I wouldn't have thought once that I could be as much like a nun as I am now. You wouldn't have thought it, either, if you could have seen how fond of society I was ten years ago. Oh, it seemed to me like being asked to Paradise when I had an invitation to a ball. But that was foolish, of course; and I suppose that I am fortunate in having outlived such ideas."

Such was the style of Mrs. Westervelt's observations. It will be seen, I suppose, that she was a woman of barely average originality and conversational powers. Ten years previous to this time, when her name was famous in the Saratoga letters of Jenkins as Miss Van L——, she had reigned in the second circle of New York society as a belle, by mere dint of beauty, of taste in dress, of grace in dancing, and of proficiency in etiquette. Now, through her marriage with Mr. Westervelt, she moved in the first circle, but not as a queen, because beauty, that mightiest wand of womanly enchantment, had disappeared from among her treasures. Her face and form were still regular and agreeable, but the most flattering of mirrors could say no more; for leanness, that gaunt enemy of American bellehood, had robbed her of half her outlines at the early age of thirty-three. But she was a harmless, genteel, sweet-voiced lady, an acquaintance to

whom you accorded an average amount of respect, an amiable friend, an affectionate wife, and a kind mother-in-law, I am certain, notwithstanding the hints of the embittered Genevieve. Let us do her some little honor, for her heart was stronger than her head, and that is not an unworthy thing in woman.

After a few minutes of dialogue, she quitted me to receive some people who had called over, in their own carriage, from Rockford. I now slipped out of the parlor under the guidance of Mrs. Van Leer, who led me into the library, where the rest of the family were arranging the programme and preparing the costumes of a series of tableaux vivants.

"Come along; we shall press you into the service; we shall make you good for something; we are going to have Rebecca and Rowena, the execution of Anne Boleyn, and a lot of other awful scenes," she prattled. "Mr. Somerville, just look at this gentleman and see what he will answer for. Won't he go in the execution?"

"Oh, exactly; just the person we want," said Somerville. "Six feet high; dark and determined; broad-shouldered enough for a battle-axe; give an awful fierceness to the tragedy; make a really tremendous spectator. He shall have the second biggest hatchet, and stand by the scaffold as a bloodthirsty lord, one of the remorseless enemies of the queen. Mr. Fitz Hugh, have the kindness to blow up all the ferocity there is in your nature, and let it blaze in your countenance. Mrs. Van Leer will deepen the gloom of your eyebrows with a piece of burnt cork. By the way, couldn't we have another tableau, representing a devil trying to carry off a soul, and an angel driving him out of the death-chamber? Miss Westervelt is just blonde enough for an angel; her sister would be a beautiful corpse, and Mr. Fitz Hugh will play the devil; he is tall enough to make a very majestic one."

"Agreed! agreed!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Leer. "Mr. Fitz Hugh, please to feel fiendish imme—diately, for we will

ere that scene first. Now, who is to be executioner in Anne Boleyn?"

"Some herculean person, of course," replied Somerville. "I think Robert is as near the true build as we can furnish; besides, he has a tremendous biceps muscle,—for we must have his arms bare. As for the ponderous king, your husband will do, with some flour on his head and a pillow under his waistcoat. We must ignore the absurd fact that the king was absent."

"Good!" said the lively lady. "King Harry, too! Why, Henry, my dear, you were born for this very occasion. But then,—as to specta—tors,—as to somebody to witness our success,—there's the rub! We shall have to call up the ser—vants, and send for Mr. and Mrs. Treat, who won't come, of course, because its theat—rical. Oh! by the way, the Capers of Rockford are in the other room. I'll go and engage them to stay. We *must* have specta—tors, or there's no use in acting. What a stu—pid place the country is, to be sure, where people are so apt to live a great ways from each other!"

"Do exert your fascinations, Mrs. Van Leer," implored Somerville. "Engage the Capers, and then come back to us, for we can't get along a moment without you."

Presently she returned, exclaiming, "Capers will stay. Capers has agreed to witness our *spectacle*. Eter—nal thanks to Capers! We must never cut Capers."

Without Somerville, our wardrobe would have been a failure. Theatrical habiliments there were none in the house except a single costume of the times of Louis XIV., which Mrs. Westervelt had once worn to a fancy ball. For the rest of our materials we had to depend on a transfiguration of old clothes. A lady's velvet cloak of obsolete fashion became a royal mantle; a brilliant smoking-cap served for an earl's bonnet; costumic anachronisms were disregarded; necessity was the mother of invention; and the result was splendidly illusive. We seized upon the back parlor, closed the sliding

doors, and arranged with a most jovial and human gabble the demoniac horror of the first tableau. Genevieve Westervelt, covered with a black cloak for a pall, was stretched upon three consecutive ottomans, her beautiful face bare and still, her long eyelashes depressed upon her cheeks, deathlike with flour, her flaxen hair drawn smoothly across her temples, and her hands folded on her breast. An infinity of sable cambric swathed my stature, and drooped from my arms in the form of most clumsy pinions, changing me into the similitude of a fiend, black and ill-shapen enough to be very wicked indeed. Behind a window-curtain hid Miss Westervelt as guardian angel, in a morning dress of white muslin, with auburn hair lying over her shoulders, and wings fabricated of bridal veils. All things had been arranged by Somerville, at the same time that he seemed to listen with the utmost deference and delight to the dictation of every eager co-laborer. He heard each one attentively; he smiled and said it was a capital idea; then, he suggested his own plan, merely as a sequel of yours; finally he put his plan into practice and complimented you on the success of it. Each one of us was persuaded to take immense credit to himself or herself for the perfection of the result. I never saw such another insinuating fellow as Somerville, nor one who was so strong in the weakness of his fellow-creatures.

The drama was ready to open, and the lights were extinguished. Mrs. Van Leer, her husband, and his brother, hurried through the hall into the front parlor, to become spectators, while Somerville and Hunter withdrew the sliding doors simultaneously, exposing a sombre death-chamber seen dream-like through the illusive gauze of a mosquito-net.

If ever there was a moment of unmitigated terror and tremendous extremity on this earth, it was when I glided forward in my tartarean drapery to the side of Genevieve, and waved my ebon pinions, or rather fins, above her in significance of monstrous, fiendish, and eternal triumph. Second by second

the horror deepened, and the cambrie flapped a clearer affirmation of the diabolical, the everlasting catastrophe. At last, when human hope had fled the scene, when despair was at its awfulest culmination, when the spectators in the front parlor were shuddering with helpless sympathy, forth rustled the guardian angel from the window-curtains, and flitted straight at the exultant devil. Now ensued a noiseless but terrible contest between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. Four wings going at once; bridal veils against cotton cambrie; virtue supernal against vice infernal; devil the biggest, but angel a hundred times the handsomest; black waving the highest, but white the quickest and most gracefully; battle tough and tight, but Beelzebub slowly losing ground, according to agreement. About thirty swings of the bridal veils fairly took the conceit out of Satan, and he began to cower. Downward he sloped, lower and lower, crouching, sliding backwards, frightened, whipped, pursued by the conquering angel, not the ghost of a chance, giving it up, and slipping blackly out of a side door with an air of discomfiture approaching to extermination. Then back to the bier glided the heavenly spirit, and raised over it her gauzy wings in expression of a holy, salvatory, eternal benison. The drama was finished; the spectators clapped their hands over the triumph of the good cause; the sliding doors met each other half-way, advancing stickily on unmellifluous castors.

"First rate! Splendid! I tell you, Mary did look like an angel. Oh, Fitz Hugh! you was awful," shouted Robert Van Leer, roaring through the hall and exploding among us with the enthusiasm of a bombshell.

"I begin to believe that the devil is fully as dark as he is painted," said Somerville, smiling upon me so graciously that I felt flattered, and thought that I must have played my part exceedingly well. "If you had been the very imp that Luther threw his inkstand at, you could not have looked blacker."

"Beautiful! Charming! Did you ever!" exclaimed the Capers in a chorus of admiration.

"His riverence got the worst of it," giggled one of the Irish servant girls, who had taken me to represent a priest, and thus had totally lost the moral of the tableau.

As I had nothing to do with the affairs between Rebecca and Rowena, I walked into the parlor, and was introduced to the Capers. The family consisted of papa, maiden sister, young lady daughter, and boy of fourteen. Mr. Capers was a tall, thin, pale, mild man, high in the shoulders, loose in his coat and pantaloons, tight and white about the neck, with light, tearful eyes, a Roman nose set slightly to one side, and a chin like the after peak of a saddle. Miss Capers, the elder, was a half-century plant, of much the same pattern with her brother, but frost-bitten and tartish in aspect. The daughter was eighteen years old, aquiline in feature, with black eyes, and the general freshness of a healthy village belle; the son, a stout boy, good-looking enough, but grimy under the finger-nails, ill at ease in his best clothes, and speechless with bashfulness. Mr. Hunter, who, like myself, had no part in the next scene, had already got the daughter's arm in his own, and was drifting away with her into the verandah, under pretext of extraordinary moonlight effects on Long Island. Falling in between the father and maiden sister, I talked of tableaux vivants, as that seemed to be their choice of subjects. The lady was theologically minded, asserted her belief in the existence of the devil, dwelt upon the awful lesson which had been taught by the tableau, and asked me whether I had lately suffered any bereavements in my family. I was obliged to confess, however unwillingly, that for some years past the Fitz Hughs had not been visited by the black horses, whereupon her interest in me evidently diminished, and she swept over to the sofa, where Mrs. Westervelt was painfully extracting a few syllables, like grinders, from writhing Master Capers. Her brother, however, clung to me, and demanded sympathy with mournful eye and speech.



I had arranged everything, she broke right out, 'Oh, pa,' said she, 'I do wish ma could see herself.' That was just what she said, sir, and it was pure nature."

He had told his story, and was satisfied. I never saw the man but twice after that evening, but I am confident that he repeated that same narrative to hundreds of persons. A spell seemed to be upon him, as upon the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge, compelling him to find a listener and to rehearse to him his quaint tale of bereavement and of consolation.

While I hesitated on the brink of his melancholy, doubting whether to disturb the stream or to let it roll on voicelessly, a note of preparation ran through the house, and all rushed into the front parlor, to behold the next tableau. The sliding doors jolted backward, and through the mosquito-net we saw Jewish Rebecca kneeling to Saxon Rowena. Genevieve Westervelt's flaxen hair, large blue-gray eyes, delicate blonde features, patrician expression, and white shoulders, did full justice to the daughter of Cedric, while Mrs. Van Leer looked handsomer as Rebecca than she had ever looked, I imagine, in her proper personality. Abundant were the jewels; artistic, rich, and deceiving the foldings of the draperies; the front lights so well thrown as to make the very shadows ornamental. It was a still picture, unstirred by gesture, and quite eloquent in its silence.

"Oh! I do think that is so lovely!" whispered Miss Lottie Capers, with an enthusiasm which almost made her forget to address herself to Mr. Hunter. "The other was horrid; but this is perfectly ro—mantic."

Mr. Hunter lost not a moment in adding his mite to the impression of the scene, by declaiming the entire passage from *Ivanhoe*, with as much fluency and exactness as if he had studied it for the occasion. The sliding doors met again, and Miss Lottie admiringly murmured, "What a wonderful memory you must have, Mr. Hunter!"

The artful youth immediately repeated a long passage from Alexander Smith, concerning stars, and, under cover of it

inveigled Miss Capers into the presence of the heavenly host as seen from the verandah.

After one more tableau, the execution of Anne Boleyn, which I shall allow the reader to make just as beautiful or just as hideous as he chooses, we closed our play, and the evening's pomp was put away like old furniture in the garrets of memory. In a few minutes more the Capers took their departure, thanking us so earnestly for our entertainment, that we all felt flattered and asserted our vehement desire to continue the acquaintance. Hunter was especially emphatic in his professions; favored them with the death of Hugo and Parisina as he accompanied them to their carriage; obtained a particular invitation to call, from Miss Lottie, and joked a good deal about her during the rest of the evening. As for me, I thought of the rich auburn streams of Miss Westervelt's hair, and concluded that the neighborhood of Seaclyff would be a delightful summer residence,—for to most men, at all events to men who have no sisters, few sights are more persuasive, more circean, than that of a woman's hair gracefully dishevelled. I must see her thus again, I said to myself; and for that I will stay a week, perhaps a month. It was because our tableaux gave rise to this resolution that they form an important event in my life, and are worthy of being recorded in the present volume. But for them and the consequent shower of gold which fell down Miss Westervelt's shoulders, I should next day have gone to New Haven, and next day to Boston, and next day, perhaps, to Nahant or Newport, and so never become identified with the fortunes of Seaclyff, nor had a chance to write its history.

But there was one other thing which contributed to make the place interesting to me, and that was an absurd curiosity to learn the meaning of the singular conversation which I had partially overheard in the morning. Looking round for Mrs. Van Leer, I observed that she had seated herself near Somerville, and was coquetting to keep his attention. Ah! I begin to understand, thought I: flirting in a wife begets

jealousy in a husband ; jealousy is the natural or unnatural parent of matrimonial quarrels ; matrimonial quarrels are sometimes carried on too loudly in back boudoirs ; the consequence is that chance visitors overhear family secrets. I looked at Mr. Henry Van Leer, to see him chafe under the affront ; but if he had passed the last twenty years in sleeping with his fathers, he could not have been more drowsily indifferent to what was passing. Perhaps I am on the wrong trace, I said to myself ; or else the man is a better dissembler than I should imagine. In the mean time, Mrs. Westervelt and Genevieve were whispering confidences in the veranda, and Mr. Hunter was troubling the spirit of the piano with some halt and lame reminiscences of Linda di Chamouni. Miss Westervelt had ruthlessly retired to put up her hair, and I waited impatiently for her reappearance, for I was anxious to receive an invitation to remain a while in the vicinity of Seacliff, and for certain instinctive, emotional reasons, which any one can understand easier than I can explain, I preferred that the encouragement should come from her rather than another. She appeared, but instead of approaching me, she took Hunter's place from him, and played Linda passionately, enchantingly. While I was deliberating whether I should sulk or turn the leaves for her, Genevieve entered, seated herself at the other end of my sofa, and started a conversation by asking, "Did you get tired of Europe?"

"Not at all. The longer I stayed, the better I liked it."

"I would have remained if I had been you. What made you come home?"

"There were too many temptations to idleness and good-for-nothingness ; my Yankee conscience rose against them."

"I suppose it is better to work hard in doing nothing than not to work at all," she said.

"Of course. It is more ridiculous, to be sure ; but it is more respectable, and it makes one happier."

"It is a consolation to hear you say so. I work hard from

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"It is not the great temptations that ruin us; it is the little ones," said I, oracularly.

"I don't believe that," she objected, shaking her head. "What do you mean by it?"

"Why, it is very clear. If the devil never asked us to do anything less than steal a horse, for instance, he would hardly catch a soul. We should get frightened at his first demand, and quit him forever."

"Exactly," she replied, nodding and laughing. "He is wonderfully cautious and cunning; before he asks you to steal a horse, he gets you to steal a pony."

How clever the creature had grown since I parted with her a year before! She was no longer a girl of sixteen; she had suddenly become a woman of seventeen.

"But what are you going to do in America, Mr. Fitz Hugh?" she resumed. "What great labors are you going to perform, to make amends for your European idleness?"

Now I really intended to become an author, having already got a book of travels on the launching-ways of a New York publisher, and having projected at least half a dozen other works in history, biography, and romance, with which I meant to storm the world's attention. But I naturally objected to making an ostentation of these facts,—and so I replied simply that I was engaged in a course of private study.

"Are you going to study in the city?" she asked. "Will the Astor Library be necessary?"

"I should prefer the country, if Seacliff is a fair specimen of it."

"Why not come to Seacliff, then?" interposed Mrs. Westervelt. "There is a boarding-place close by, just under the hill. Our neighbors are plain people, but they would make you very comfortable. We have had friends there before. Why not take rooms with them?"

"Yes, why not, Mr. Fitz Hugh?" said Miss Westervelt, turning upon me from the piano.

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CHAPTER IV.

DOMICILIATION.

HAD the reader been in front of the Rockford Hotel on a certain bright June morning of eighteen hundred and fifty something, he might have seen a spruce young man getting into a shabby old barouche. He was tall and strong in build, with black eyes, long and thick black hair, aquiline nose, a forehead which seemed to retreat, above because it was so heavy below, a darkly pale complexion and a moustache as ample and sombre as that of the immemorial opera brigand. He wore a sober morning dress of the English fashion, and one of those broad-brimmed soft hats which the advent of Kossuth had lately made permissible. Giving the porter thirty cents, which was a compromise between his natural extravagance as an American and the economy which he had learned abroad, he leaned back in the barouche, lit a cigar, and told the negro coachman to drive to the brown house just below the Westervelt place. If the reader had asked me who the young man was, I should have replied (remembering the title-page of *Pendennis*), that he was my lifelong enemy, Mr. Louis Fitz Hugh.

A drive of less than three miles took me to my new domicile. It was a dingy, small-windowed, huge-chimneyed, little old house, with a short roof before and a long one behind, reminding me vaguely of a chubby dog sitting on his haunches. Thirty yards from the front of it rippled the



hand, I followed Ma Treat into her prim, puritanical little front parlor; that sacred retreat which no dust or cobwebs ever deformed, whence flies were daily banished, and whither the feet of common mortality rarely attained; that abode of curtained obscurity where the family Bible loomed largely on the cherry table, and the hereditary brass candlesticks stood sentinel on the mantel. In this sanctuary we sat and talked of my early history, while my numerous pieces of baggage trooped gradually up stairs on the shoulders of limping Mr. Weston. Our lengthy and rambling reminiscences amounted to the following commonplace narrative.

My mother falling seriously ill when I was three weeks old, I was put out to nurse with a plain country couple named Treat, who had just lost an infant of their own. They took kindly care of me for two years, and nourished me into a vigorous small-boyhood. My mother has often related to me with a vanity for which I must of course pardon her, how piteously my nurse cried when she was called on to let me go out of the arms of that affection which had become a second nature. It seems to me that I can remember the woful scene, but as I have an equally distinct recollection of two or three incidents which happened before I was born, I sometimes doubt whether the picture of a weeping woman holding a petticoated urchin, which exists in my imagination, was not painted there altogether from hearsay. Perhaps it was in some such spiritual manner that Joyce Heth and all those other colored centenarians, of whom we read in the papers, dandled the infancy of Washington. Well, for years after quitting my foster-parents, I used to pay them annual visits, generally timed to some great change in my life, as, for instance, the occasion of getting my first pockets, my first breeches, my first pair of boots. Pa Treat and Ma Treat I styled them, in distinction from my parents, whom I dignified with the more awful titles of Father and Mother. They always had a cake of maple sugar for me, or a card of

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read, or a cutter whittled out by Pa Treat's own jack-knife, or a pair of lambs'-wool stockings from Ma Treat's needle, as well as long stories about my wonderful adventures, when I bumped my remarkable nose, or cut my ordinary teeth. After I got old enough to be sent to high-school, I began to lose sight of Pa and Ma Treat. My studies, Europe, the pleasures and interests of manhood, broadened the distance between us, until on my visit to Seacliff, it was years since I had seen or scarcely thought of them. To my shame be it said, they had been the first to start up in recognition at the end of the old familiar name; and now Ma Treat led me out the house with as much delight as if I were still the innocent two-year-old who had toddled away from the lang-syne. She made fifty apologies for a neat chamber and convenient closet bedroom which drew my warmest praises. She absolutely wanted to board me for nothing, and accepted my own price with great reluctance and mortification. After five minutes of shyness, she took me into the old nursery department, called me Lewy, as she had done twenty-two years before, wanted to get me a milk toast as if I still had my first set of teeth, and would have held me in lap if I had shown the least desire for a child's privilege.

"Well, Lewy, I s'pose I must clear out and give you a chance to put yourself to rights," she said at last. "There's soap and there's soap, and there's towels. If you want to wash, you holler, and I'll fly right up."

I went out, and I unpacked my trunk. That done, I looked at my watch to see if it was late enough for a call on the neighbors; but as it still lacked a few minutes of ten, I did not dare to trouble the ladies, and amused myself by taking a view of Seacliff and its surroundings. The bluff, on which stood the Yankee Parthenon, closed the bay to the south in a low precipice of awkward, ugly rock, prevalent along this shore, worn and torn at the bot-

tom by waves, and stained adown its rough face with the drizzle of earth and decayed grasses. It was no great affair of a cliff, but there was enough of it perhaps to justify a name for a country-house. Outward from it spread the changeable green of the Sound, terminated southward by the yellow sand-banks of Long-Island and westward by the verdant treadings of the Connecticut shore, but stretching eastward into a watery horizon which recalled the unconfined sublinities of mid ocean. Other bluffs were sown at wide intervals along the coast; and behind lay the low, desultory hillocks of New England. On the east, a quarter of a mile off, a marshy rivulet strolled indolently into the Sound, forming a small haven where nestled a sloop yacht, a trivial fishing-smack or two, and three or four of those fast, light flat-bottomed sailboats known as sharpces. There were trees, grass, cattle, houses, and church spires in the landscape, and white sails in the sea view.

As I made these observations from a dwarfish knoll some thirty yards to the left of my new residence, I heard the voice of Ma Treat behind me, culling in impassioned tones, "Here he is, husband! Here's Lewy Fitz Hugh, as sure as you're alive. Here's Pa Treat a-coming, Lewy! and glad enough to see you."

I turned, and beheld a short, broad, stocky man of fifty-five trudging hastily along the beach, closely followed by a duck-legged urchin of six or seven, at full waddle. Pa Treat stumped up to me with a smile of mingled incredulity and delight on his weather-beaten face, and, without saying a word at first, shook hands for a period which, owing to his tremendous grips, seemed nearly equal to our separation. Meantime Ma Treat, dragging duck-legs forward by the arm, looked on with tears in her eyes and talked for the four of us.

"Ain't he a tall one!" said Pa Treat, at last. "Who'd a thought it! Why, Lewy,—Mr. Fitz Hugh I mean,—come in and set down. Dreadful sorry now I didn't stay



grandfather. At first sight he seemed a mere tadpole, whose principal characteristics were a big belly and means of locomotion; though afterwards, when I came to know him better, I discovered that he had a soul as well as another. A painful blush overspread his tanned features, extending from forehead to throat, and very possibly down to his toes, as he advanced in front of Ma Treat's knee, and speechlessly made his short-necked manners. I patted his spacious back encouragingly, and asserted my belief that he was a nice boy, and a great comfort to his grandparents.

"Oh Lewy! we should be awful lonesome without him," said Ma Treat, much moved. "We bless the Lord-that-is-on-high's great mercies for preserving him to us. He is, indeed, a monstrous comfort to us. That is, *when he's a good boy*," she added in a solemn aside. "But sometimes his sinful heart gets the upper hands; and then he's a great grief to his poor old granpa and granma. A foolish son is a grief to his father; Proverbs, seventeenth, twenty-fifth."

Nothing could be more sepulchral than the tone with which she thus alluded to the lad's natural, and occasionally, it seems, ungovernable wickedness of soul. Johnny's small flicker of self-righteousness went out under it, like a candle in the breath of a mephitic cavern, and he drooped upon his cricket again in a state of the gloomiest spiritual humiliation. It was evident that if his brief legs were not early trained to walk in the way they should go, it would not be for lack of orthodox reproof and instruction on the part of his grandmother. By way of changing a subject which stung so sharply through the rents in Johnny's conscience, I remarked that the old house still stood in spite of winter winds.

"Yes; it's used to 'em I reckon," said Pa Treat. "It's an antic old house, and no mistake."

"Antic?" inquired I, with some amazement, at the same time picturing to myself a venerable brown dwelling dancing madly up and down the shore to the tune of some ocean

hornpipe, or skurrying away over land to some witch revel on the wings of a January gale.

"Yes; right down antic; my grandfather built it; much as a hundred years old," explained Pa Treat.

I saw that he meant antique. "And who built the house on the hill?" I asked. "Mr. Westervelt?"

"No; another New Yorker,—Mr. Nathan Skelton,—awful great bank and railroad man,—regular stiffy. I tell you, *he* cut a swath. But he busted."

"Some speculator tickled him into swelling and then cracked him open, I suppose, as boys serve a bladder-fish."

"No tellin'. Most all them New Yorkers *do* bust. I expect it's their company ruins 'em."

"Their company? Oh, you mean their visitors. So Skelton had a great many visitors?"

"Acre lots full. Then such goings on! Such eating and drinking! Such jigs and jigamarees! People driving up night and day. But they dwindled down finally to pretty much nothing but sheriffs."

"And how do you like the Westervelts?" I inquired, hoping, perhaps, that he would say something of the young ladies or of the mystery.

"A good deal better. Ma Treat knows more about 'em than I do."

"Well, Lewy," said Ma Treat, thus appealed to, "they are pretty nice folks, though ruther curious. Mr. Westervelt's a mild, meeching sort of a man, with no more harm in him than a blind kitten. He makes me think of a lame rooster, keeping away by himself and not crowing any, for fear the others will peck at him. Mrs. Westervelt is mighty genteel, but a leetle too lofty to suit me. Pride's a dreadful sin, Lewy; and I, for one, can't bear it. Pride ruined Satan, and pride can ruin you and I. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall; Proverbs, sixteenth, eighteenth. Remember that, Johnny. Sometimes Johnny's proud, and then he's a naughty boy. (This in the glum,

funereal aside which usually italicized her allusions to Johnny's moral baseness.) But the girls are real little darlings; and Miss Mary especially is the sweetest creetur that ever I saw, or Pa Treat either. Some folks think she ain't so handsome as her sister; but handsome is, that handsome doos, Lewy; and that sets Miss Mary on high. That's Mr.-Jacobs-that-preaches-in-Rockford's opinion, too, I reckon; and glad enough he'd be to get her, I know; and a splendid minister's wife she'd make. Now Miss Genevieve ain't a bad little thing, neither, and beautiful she is, to be sure. But then she's mighty uncertain; you don't know what she'll do next; you can't calculate on her, as you can on her sister. One day she's as friendly and cosy as a robin-redbreast, and the next she chatters and snaps about like a sassy cat-bird. If one thing don't suit, nothing suits, and she has a peck for everything. I guess she means to be kind-hearted, but don't realize other people's feelings. Now Mary is quite different, because she considers that there may be two sides to a question, and that her neighbors have a right to their opinion as well as she to hers. Then she's such a charitable, forethoughted one! Whenever there's any sick folks to be watched with, or any poor folks to be fed and sewed for, you may cut around as fast as ever you can, and you'll find that Miss Mary has been everywhere before you. Ain't it so, Pa Treat?"

"Ex—actly!" said my foster-father with great emphasis. "Always fixing up soups and jellies, and crinkum-crankums, and what-nots, for somebody. The best, handiest, puttiest little angel that ever I see or heerd of."

"Well, I must go up and make a call on the little angel," said I, looking at my watch and rising.

"Do, Lewy!" urged Ma Treat. "Go right up, and ask to see *her* particular. And if you can court her and get her for a wife, Lewy, don't fail to do it. Ma Treat recommends her, and she's a good one. She is the daughter who has done virtuously and excelled them all; Proverbs, thirty-first,

twenty-ninth. I had sot my heart on having her for Mr. Jacobs-our-minister's wife; but I'd ruther by a great sight see you carry her off; and so had Pa Treat. Good-bye, Lewy."

Smiling in my sleeve at the eagerness with which my old nurse plunged into the matrimonial question, I ran up stairs to get a fresh pair of gloves, and take a precautionary survey of myself in the twelve-by-twenty looking-glass which adorned my mantel.





CHAPTER V.

CEREMONIAL AND MORAL.

WHILE I was still at my toilet, voices resounded in the little front yard, and presently Ma Treat bustled up with the intelligence that Mr. Somerville and those Van Leers had called to see me.

“Shall I tell them that you’ll come down?” she asked. “Our parlor is yours, Lewy, and you may do whatever you like there,—smoke or what not. Don’t you be afraid because it’s the best room in the house. The best room that we’ve got is none too good for your company, Lewy.”

Without knowing Ma Treat or some similarly immaculate housewife of the olden kind, it would be impossible fully to estimate the immensity of the sacrifice which was contained in that proffer. To smoke in her parlor was about equivalent in her eyes to smoking in church; and I am persuaded that to no mortal beside myself and my intimates would she have conceded that fragrant privilege. Thanking her as she deserved, I told her that it would be more agreeable to see the gentlemen in my chamber; and in a moment afterwards the naked staircase rang and the ancient flooring of the passage creaked beneath the tread of my visitors. First entered, with his usual forwardness and vivacity, the skipping-jack, then the two ponderous Van Leers, and lastly Somerville, suavely nodding precedence to his companions.

“Well, Mr. Fitz Hugh, what sort of a night did you pass

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ur carouse?" said Hunter, flinging himself into a rock-air and slapping his boots with a riding-whip. "I assure you, gentlemen, that I consider myself a man of pretty head; but for once the demon of wine was almost too for me, and I hooted and sang like a bacchanal all the week to Seacliff. Unless Mr. Fitz Hugh has the most firm nerves in the world, I think he must have got behind his sheets in a remarkably happy frame of mind."

He spoke so glibly, so pleasantly and with such assurance, that I really hated to spoil his story, although astonished at enormous exaggeration. Still, thinking it best for principle's sake to set him right, and not wishing to make my *debut* as Seacliff in the character of a wine-bibber, I expressed my surprise at the effect of sherry on his system, inasmuch as we hardly have drunk more than three glasses a piece. "Not more than three glasses, you think!" he exclaimed, with a crestfallen look. "Why, I was just telling Mr. Somerville, I think, that we must have finished the bottle. Didn't you say something of that sort, Somerville?"

"Two bottles, you said, my dear fellow. But it makes no difference. A bottle more or less is of no account."

Hunter willingly retreated behind this frail apology and flight of fancy, and subsided into a momentary silence, appearing somewhat humiliated.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh," said Somerville, "our visit is partly ceremonial and partly moral. The ceremonial portion consists in giving you formal welcome to Seacliff, when you are already that we are delighted to see you here. As for the moral or practical portion, I suppose it lies in accepting your hospitalities. (I was handing cigars and matches.) Thank you;—I vastly prefer the cheroots; they are milder and sooner finished. By the way, smoking is quite a moral amusement since the *Reveries of a Bachelor* were written. I know a friend who reads that book through once a year, solely for the purpose of enjoying his cigars in a proper frame of mind."

"He thinks that, with that preparation, one of these cigars is equal to high mass."

"If that is so," broke in Mr. Hunter, "then I ought to be one of the best Christians a-going. Gentlemen, I think I am speaking within bounds when I say that I have smoked more cigars than any other man of my age. Why, when I was in college I never thought of going through the day without puffing off at least thirty. I think you will allow, Mr. Fitz Hugh, that that was a pretty fair allowance, considering that I graduated at twenty."

"You han't graduated yet, and you an't twenty," put in Robert Van Leer, rather gruffly.

"I am aware of the ill-natured justice of your correction, Bob," said Hunter; "but I *shall* graduate, and shall be twenty on or about the same time; *vide* Family Bible and College Catalogue. The essential of my assertion remains uncontradicted, and that is that I have smoked thirty cigars *per diem*."

"Thirty cigars a day is enormous," I remarked. "I wonder you haven't destroyed your digestion."

"It demands a constitution of iron," he obligingly admitted, but seemed to consider that a sufficient concession, and did not offer to let my faith off at a lower figure. Later in our acquaintance he retracted ten cigars, and only insisted on twenty a day, explaining that the others were exhausted in treating his classmates or purchasing the favorable countenance of one of the tutors.

Meantime I felt a gentle craving at my heart, which no observations concerning cigars could satisfy, and which, I knew, would not be quieted, until I should be able to bring up the Misses Westervelt as a subject of conversation. To gain this end after a roundabout, undetected fashion, I turned to the married Van Leer, and hoped that his wife and the other ladies of Seacliff had not suffered by the excitement of the previous evening. Before the slow creature's brain could realize the meaning of my remark, Hunter answered for him.

"Thank you, Mr. Fitz Hugh; my sister and cousins are

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“They will be happy to see you this afternoon, or you feel disposed to call.”

“I believe that the only person who has suffered in consequence of the evening is Miss Capers,” smiled Somerville.

“Now, Mr. Somerville! none of that! no exclaiming the skipping-jack, rising from his chair, and going to and fro with all the dignity of port that his coat would warrant. “A lady’s name should be sacred. I will make allowance, too, for the inexperience of a country girl. When I told you those circumstances, Mr. Somerville, I understood, although, perhaps, I forgot to mention, that the confession was made under a supposition of the most secrecy. I feel free to blame you for your imprudence, because I am able at the same time to declare that I have fore known you to transgress the slightest, the most sacred duty of instinctive delicacy. It is the only error, Mr. Somerville, with which I have to charge you during all our acquaintance. In point of fact, however, I can’t find much to blame you for it. The joke was too good a one to keep,”

“Mr. Fitz Hugh, that young lady must be a very good one, who ventures on sentimentalities and quotes poetry the first time that she ever meets you. But, gentlewithstanding some slight indiscretion in Miss Capers, I can assure you,—and I want you to mark my words,—that if ever she has a year’s experience of good sense she will emerge from it [one of the most entrancing beauties that ever wore figured stockings.] She has the stuff to make a reigning toast of.”

“Toast, or dry?” asked Somerville, with a good-natured smile, like that of a polite man who has heard enough.

“Somerville,” replied the original, stopping short in his tirade and throwing out his right hand tragically, “I have come to tell you that you are the most diabolical fellow I ever met in the poetry that I ever met. But I will answer: milk

toast, in her present state of pastoral innocence; dry, when she has been held long enough to the slow fire of fashion."

Quite satisfied with his final effort, he took to his rocking-chair again, crossed his legs, fell back gracefully and lighted another cheroot. I was unwilling now to recall the names of the Misses Westervelt to notice, for fear that this voluble youth might proceed to hint that they too had fallen down at his feet and worshipped.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh," said Somerville, taking advantage of our small friend's brief silence, "I am very glad that you have joined our little coterie. The circle was large enough before, to be agreeable; but one or two more well-selected persons were needed to make it a luxury. I don't think that you will find time hang heavy on your hands. Indeed, it would be no compliment to you to prophecy the contrary; for I believe that, in general, it is only empty-headed people who find their time a burden. Things here are decidedly pleasant. I don't, of course, include myself among the attractions of the place. I am a mere guest, or, in hotel phrase, a transient and not a permanent. But the long and short of it is, that there are just about women enough here, and just about men enough, and they are all interesting."

"Thank you, Mr. Somerville," observed Hunter, nonchalantly, at the same time looking with one eye through a smoke-ring which he had just exhaled.

"You will certainly find them so when you come to know them better," continued Somerville. "The salient point of my friend Mr. Henry Van Leer's character is, that he has one of the prettiest, handiest sloop-yachts that ever lay off Hoboken."

"That's a fact, Somerville, if you are a joking," observed the individual referred to, speaking for the first time since he bade me good-morning and asked me how I found myself.

"As for Mr. Robert Van Leer," pursued Somerville, "his originality breaks out chiefly in shark-fishing. He will catch

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tervelt; and knowing that he would be a dangerous antagonist, capable of making a man exceedingly uncomfortable, I resolved to avoid a rupture with him as long as possible.

"Well, Messieurs Van Leer and Hunter," said he presently, "I propose that we depart. We have bored Mr. Fitz Hugh sufficiently, this morning, to make him free of Sealcliff hospitalities for all the summer. We must remember, too, that he has a right to his dinner. I think I smell hot meat, and I fancy that our friend's knife and fork are ready for him. Good morning, Mr. Fitz Hugh. We depend on you for this afternoon at three. Van Leer the senior, here, proposes to put his yacht at your service, and let you hunt in his shark preserve."

"Very happy; depend on you, sir," remarked the said personage, concisely, but with a face full of sincerity. As I surveyed that broad moon of stolid amiability, his countenance, I could not but wonder that he should be a hard husband, wearing matrimony like a crown of thorns rather than of roses. His brother, Robert, slowly rolled out of his chair, nodded, and lumbered into the hall, without speaking. Meantime the skipping-jack uncrossed his legs, tossed the stump of his cigar out of the window, rose to the fullest altitude of his five feet four inches, and, by his whole manner, prepared us for something very impressive in the way of a valedictory.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh," he enunciated, "I never fancied ship-timber, nor horseflesh, but I do know that I have a perfect genius for Jamaica Rum. If you will call at my room, at any time, I can offer you some of the rarest rum that ever dispensed its perfume to the Atlantic breeze as it sailed the Gulf Stream. Will you come? Ah! you will be very happy—that is the old phrase. But, will you promise to come? Thank you. Good-morning."

The rhetorical flourish with which he uttered the commonest things was one of the most amusing points in the deportment of this young gentleman. When he bade you a good-morning, it seemed as if he were taking you up into an

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young; and then my conscience tells me that, had the two young girls been two old maids, I should not have gone to Seacliff, no matter what mystery haunted it.

But the other members of our little coterie were also, in my eyes at least, a peculiar people. Somerville was the most wonderful incarnation of blandness, grace, and social flexibility that I had ever met, reminding perpetually of those famous carpet-knights, *sans peur et sans reproche*, the Chesterfields and Richelieus of old. This idea of his elegance, indeed, is taken from a young man's point of view, and it is very possible that had I been a few years older, had I seen more of society, his polish would not have seemed to me so dazzling and incomparable. There was a noticeable difference between his manner toward men and his manner toward women. In the company of us male beings he had the tone of a man of the world; clever, practical, freely exhibiting his superior abilities, full of gay badinage, and often sarcastic; never irritating, however, because his satire was conveyed in delicate language, and sweetened with a smile of the suavest friendliness. "If I did not know your good nature and your excellent sense," this smile appeared to say, "I should not dare to venture upon such an unworthy piece of pleasantry." But Somerville uttered no sarcasms, not even upon his masculine fellow-creatures, in the presence of women. He thought, perhaps, that no subject should be presented for their consideration, which was not perfumed, roseate, halcyon, calculated to bring out their gentlest emotions, or at least unlikely to vex their fair faces with ungracious excitement. If he contradicted them, his doubts were as insinuating as sleep, his arguments an appeal to their vanity, and his adverse decisions figures of speech. His whole deportment, indeed, through all its ingredients of posture, gesture, look, voice, words, and ideas, was a marvellously soothing prescription, perfectly adapted to assuaging moral inflammations, producing cheerful opiate illusions, and leaving the subject of treatment in a delicious trance of self-satisfaction. Nothing could be more demulcent

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samic; it made me think of anodynes and cherry peec-
it was enough to cure a cold only to hear him talk.
nally, indeed, I wondered whether there might not be
arshness, some vulgarity of soul, under this downy
of courtesy. Might he not, like that fair dissembler,
1, have a stone for a heart? It was an interesting
1, but I let it lie for the present, not being able to
it.

her person who deserved and got a great deal of my
was little Mr. Hunter. Only nineteen years old, as
e learned, he looked twenty-four and talked sixty.
one of the most braggart, garrulous, shallow, pup-
superficially plausible, mischievous, well-meaning, rest-
ipping creatures, who ever had a high opinion of
without meaning thereby to depreciate his fellow
He was not malicious, nor uncommonly vicious; his
, in fact, partook more of the character of suicide than
ler: they were considerably to his own injury, without
much damage to others. His stature was small and
ght trifling, but he was not in the least suspicious of
s conversation was nicotian and spirituous, hovering
reless satisfaction about the subjects of tobacco and
liquors, and dispensing a moral aroma which re-
one of the odors of a bar-room. He had such high
ents of honor that I cannot blame him severely for not
trying to act up to them; and perhaps it was in con-
ce of his immense respect for the truth, that he usually
ed and adorned it as much as possible. One result of
d peculiarity was that his talk had an inexhaustible
; he never, or hardly ever, told the same story twice
same way; his freedom from the monotony of facts
-lightful. In short, he seemed to converse on the
le that two lies make a truth, just as two negatives
an affirmative. In all his communications concerning
n history he acknowledged the existence of the ideal
: much more distinctly than that of the real Hunter.

If, on any trying occasion, his Objective had told a cowardly lie, when his Subjective had received a heroic truth, he related the circumstance as if the latter alone had spoken, and had thereby conferred immortal honor on the name of Hunter. So of physical courage: the actual man sometimes trembled for his person; the fictive man was invariably as brave as Achilles; and the lion-like emotions of the latter were reported as the deeds of the former. During the first few days of our acquaintance I made various absurd mistakes as to the identity of these two individuals, and, hearing of the transcendent worthiness of Hunter the poetic, imputed it all to Hunter the prosaic, who in fact was subject to the ordinary weaknesses of humanity. By a little effort you can easily see a common person's ideal standing up alongside of him; and the loftier, the more ethereal it is, the smaller and earthier it makes the poor reality appear. Hunter, however, never could distinguish between himself and his parhelion. He made a mistake in the *morale* which would be very nearly paralleled in the physical world, by a man who should ignore his own body and only acknowledge the existence of his shadow or his reflection in the mirror. What an extremely ridiculous blunder, and how fortunate for the dignity of humanity that so few of us fall into it!

The Van Leer brothers would commonly be considered very uninteresting individuals. They were as silent as Spartans, and as stupid as Bœotians. Their intellectual and moral nature seemed to be feeble and imponderable in proportion as their physique was muscular and weighty. They were so much alike that when one was present you did not miss the other, and so dull that when both were absent you did not miss either. Yet, in spite of this unusual vacuity of character, they afforded another proof of the great rule that no human being exists, whose mind, like his face, has not some distinctive features, some indestructible expression of individuality. They had a certain brute resistance, a *vis inertia*, a "strength to sit still," which unobtrusively de-

manded, and finally obtained, some small measure of consideration. Honesty of purpose, when they had a purpose, was as natural to them as the hair of their heads; and in their broad faces appeared a bovine modesty and mildness which expressed the stolid benignity of their characters. The only superficial difference between them was, that Robert was the least taciturn and the most easily attracted. He soon granted me his friendship, his trust, his confessions, his admiration, and rather more of his presence than I would have required if the choice had been left me.

As for his brother, it was weeks before I penetrated his seven-fold bullhides of phlegmatic reserve, to where the blood was warm and the heart was beating. One cause of this greater reticence, doubtless, was that he had a wife; for the confidences of a married man do not easily flow out toward his bachelor acquaintance. He has another duct for his emotions; he has told his tale to one who always hears him well; he need not repeat it at reckless random; his desire for sympathy is satisfied. And yet this poor fellow and his wife are always quarrelling, I said to myself; for no other hypothesis can satisfactorily explain the words of wrath which exhaled through the keyhole of the boudoir. No wonder at it, I added; they are totally different in tastes and temperament; and her levity must naturally become impatient of his heaviness. I had not yet observed how steadily Nature tries to obviate extremes, and to restore endangered equilibriums, by leading us to love and unite with our opposites. Tall men marry short women; dull men marry lively women; and so it should be. I myself was six feet high, and prayed for a little wife, if any. Returning to Mr. and Mrs. Van Leer, I confess with shame, that their matrimonial disagreement was a humorous spectacle to me, and that I watched its symptoms with a malicious gusto, for which, in all poetical justice, I ought to have been punished by the gift of a Xantippe. In a spirit of still deeper compunction, I admit that I one day related to Somerville my eaves-dropping adventure at the

door of the boudoir. He laughed in such a constrained manner that I took it as a reproof to my babbling, and proceeded to stammer forth that very likely the whole proceeding was a mere boisterous joke on the part of Mr. Van Leer.

"A charitable suggestion," said he; "but don't be deceived by it. Our friend Henry will have to go through several processes of transmigration, and be a monkey at least once, before he becomes capable of a joke. I am afraid that he and Mrs. Van Leer are simply getting used to each other, and wearing off their corners by attrition."

About the only discord in the life of Seaciff was an occasional sharp note from Miss Genevieve. At least once every day she seemed to remember some unpleasant mystery in the household existence, and gave tongue to a sarcasm or two, meant to startle, I could not exactly swear whom, although I always glanced inquiringly at the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Van Leer. Clever and handsome as the girl was, I began to dislike her as a tartar. But in spite of these little jars, my first week at Seaciff was wonderfully pleasant, and lingers on my memory now like an echo of gay music. Van Leer's yacht played the chief instrumental part in our social harmony. In this fleet, fragile skimmer, we waged fierce maritime war against the sharks and other finny tribes, besides making excursions to the Narrows, Long Island, Bridgeport, and New Haven. Mrs. Van Leer always went, always got sea-sick, always blamed her husband for it, and vowed she would never go again. The rest of us were good sailors, and endured her sufferings with much philosophy. The Van Leers considered themselves very clever in working their coquettish little clipper, and quite equal to taking the conceit out of a stiff breeze; but, in case of a long excursion, they remembered the possibility of a northeaster, and reinforced their seamanship with the amphibious wisdom of Pa Treat. My foster-father was, like Ulysses, a knowing navigator, and a much enduring man: in a squall he could manage the yacht as easily as trundle a wheelbarrow, and in a calm he could let the Van Leers have

their own blundering way. The only circumstance which prevented him from being a perfect commander, was his entire inability, except in a blow, to think of the right word at the right time; for on sea as on shore he had temporary names for things, and was in a fair way, if his influence should become extensive and permanent, to make an entirely new speech of the Anglo-Saxon, and necessitate a radical revisal of Webster's Dictionary. The helm, for instance, was sometimes the thingumbob, sometimes the jigamarec, sometimes the rinktum. He used to amuse us immensely by observing, in his slow, stammering way, that it was about time to furl the crimkumcrankum, or to set the rigajig, or to port the what-d'ye-call-um, at the same time pointing with his forefinger to illustrate his imperfect utterance. But it was interesting to observe how this impediment fell from off him in a moment of danger, and how clearly and promptly his orders came when the yacht was dipping her bulwarks, and the sea was whitening under the angry breath of a squall. Who has not known of similar or parallel cases? Many an experienced surgeon feels his knife shake until the moment that he applies it to the flesh. I once travelled with a dead shot, whose hand used to tremble like a leaf while he raised his weapon, but who in the act of firing, was transformed to marble, and never missed his mark.

But let us linger no longer among such helter-skelter reminiscences of character and unimportant incident. Really, these writers of books sometimes become excessively tedious.



CHAPTER VI.

EQUESTRIAN AND EMOTIONAL.

ABOUT a week after my domiciliation an adventure befell me which I shall presume to call noticeable because it made me, heart and soul, an actor in the domestic drama of Seacliff. I had an engagement to ride with the Misses Westervelt and Somerville, but on entering the house at the hour appointed, I found the young ladies still in their morning dresses.

"We can't go yet," said Genevieve. "One of the horses has cast a shoe and been sent to the blacksmith's. But come in and wait. We can play backgammon till he comes back."

Instead of backgammon we chose cards, and amused ourselves for half an hour with solitaire, old-maid, telling fortunes, &c. I remember perfectly what a succession of thrills I underwent when the magic slips of paper declared that I was to be the young man who admired Mary,—who became engaged to her,—who married,—yes, ye gods, married her! I consulted Mary's face at each of these heart-shaking announcements, and was disappointed, almost incensed, to discover there only the faintest, the most ethereal of blushes, and that perhaps the mere child of laughter. I would have preferred something warmer than rose-tint, I had become so singularly partial to the Misses Westervelt.

"I hear the horses," said Mary, throwing down the cards. "Come, Jenny; we must hurry."

As she rose from the table her sleeve caught a miniature case and flung it on the floor. Picking it up and rewarding myself by opening it, I found it to be her portrait; a daguerreotype, indeed, and therefore doing her blonde beauty unavoidable injustice; but, for all that, remarkably like, especially in the sweet expression.

"Ah, that is the only good daguerreotype that ever was taken of me," she observed, glancing at it over my shoulder. It seemed to me at that moment as if my blood must be full of little bubbles, like champagne. If the youth lives who can feel, totally unmoved, that a beautiful girl's neck-ribbon is fluttering and rustling against his coat-collar, he must excuse me for regarding him with mingled curiosity and pity.

"Excellent! perfect!" I muttered, anxious to say something nice about the original, but unable to think to the purpose.

"I know three persons who are dying to have that picture," laughed Genevieve, looking back from the doorway.

"Am I one of them?" I asked, with an eager bluntness which scared me.

"No," replied Genevieve, very coolly, as she shut the door after herself and sister.

I was painfully cut and offended, I remember, by this reply, and wasted the next ten minutes in wondering what the deuce the saucy little chit meant by it. Another annoying circumstance was, that when we came to mount, Somerville, as the oldest cavalier, took charge of the oldest sister, aided her into the saddle with enviable dexterity, and set off by her side as gracefully as he would have started in a polka. Evidently I need not hope to eclipse him in the field any more than in the parlor.

The mounting of the young ladies was their own, a present, as I understood, from their grandfather, and consisted of a perfectly matched pair of wiry little blacks, spirited and speedy, broken alike to saddle and harness. My horse, the property of the same wealthy senior, was a slender bay, half-

blooded, and the best animal that I ever bestrode. Somerville had Henry Van Leer's beast, a dark chestnut, with white feet, powerful and swift, but with shies enough in him to unseat a squadron of dragoons. I began to feel, before we had been long on the road, that if he should scare his rider to death, or break his handsome nose, it would be no enormous drawback on my happiness. I was very anxious to gain the admiration of the Misses Westervelt, and Somerville was making himself alarmingly attractive to them. By means of his leading questions and Socratic stratagems of dialogue he kept Mary constantly talking, except when he himself discoursed, rolling out his superb mellow tones with a sort of poetic elation quite congenial to the surrounding gay summer flowers, the sweet exuberance of green meadow, and the gladdening tide of sunlight.

Before long, I suspected that Miss Genevieve was even more dissatisfied than myself with the division of our party. She became sententious, sulky, and finally silent, taking small notice of my many offers at conversation, and checking her lively black until she rasped him into a foaming, snorting tempest of horseflesh. I was surprised at this; the day before, Genevieve had not seemed to like Somerville; to-day, she was evidently annoyed by his preference for her sister. Women are full of apparent contradictions, I soliloquized; not so much because they are unstable, as because they are restricted. Society will not let them speak frankly: but demands that they should seem to avoid those whom they prefer, and that they should often endure with smiles what they detest. Upon this hint I spake.

"Miss Genevieve, do women often wish themselves men?"

She colored so quickly that I queried whether I had not touched upon the very subject of her thoughts.

"C'est selon;—that depends," said she, translating herself.—"That depends upon what? may I ask. The woman's nature, or her position?"

"Both, of course," she answered, and then fell to dis-

ACLIFF.

had started at sight of a distant
her a full minute to bring the
filling semi-subjection, I lost the
had to begin on a fresh spindle.
ioned to you a resemblance be-
Beatrice de' Cenci?"

whether you can see the likeness."

agreement now ensued with the
y squealed with indignation, and
f as a *cheval incompris*.

" begged Mary. "Please don't
eat him gently, do, dear. He is

ed to reply, or even to turn her
entered on peaceably, though in
ently I tried a new topic, and
tion another revolution.

entry in a small way. The pres-
for the lack of high relief in the
nore New Yorkers do not come
entry-houses."

ther day of the beauties of New
visited Norwich in the eastern

tion of it, then. For my part, I
fortunate towns in point of situa-
the country. It perches on both
irregular banks, which command
from every salient point in the
of the whole. It has rare ad-
o itself, and, so to speak, mirror-
vision."

“Like some people,” observed the gracious little lady, without turning her eyes from her horse’s forelock.

“Oh! you are satirical,” said I, quite desperate, “you insinuate a charge of vanity. Well, I shall plead not guilty, merely for form’s sake, and stand a trial. Please to open the examination.”

“I have none to make. I did not allude to you,” was the discouraging reply.

I felt indignant at last, and resolved to let her hold her tongue just as long as that should be her ladylike pleasure. I was puzzled as well as annoyed; for this was the first irksome interview that I had ever had with Genevieve, notwithstanding her general independence and occasional captiousness; and I felt tolerably certain, that I personally had done nothing which could justify her in thus consuming me with her indignation. Some one else had perturbed her, it was clear; and I suffered, simply for the crime of contiguity. There are certain persons,—we have all seen them,—whose instinct it is, when they receive a wrong, to revenge it upon the first living creature that comes within reach. They are not necessarily termagants; they may have, at other times, very gentle and generous emotions; but they are as illogical and inconsiderate in their ebullitions as tea-kettles; they know no better than to boil over and scald what is nearest. Genevieve must sulk at me because she is separated from Somerville, I concluded; for a girl rarely quarrels with one marriageable man except for the sake of another.

On we rode for ten or fifteen minutes, glumly inarticulate, and chiefly occupied, as I believe, in listening to the snatches of animated colloquy which now and then reached our ears from the pair behind us. Coming to a short, but steep rise in the ground, where the road was guttered by recent rain, and the footing uncertain in consequence of large, loose pebbles, we drew up our horses and fell into a walk, so that Somerville’s conversation became distressingly audible. He was evidently shining in his fullest lustre, and perhaps send-

ing his rays deep into the hearts of both the Misses Westervelt. But on reaching the brow of the hill, a change came over the face of things, and I, the opaque one, the unexpressed, the unappreciated, suddenly found my moment of glory, and put on a splendid halo. Genevieve and I, riding in advance, had just passed a blackberry thicket, when I noticed an Italian organ-grinder seated in its shadow, his uncouth music-box towering above his shoulders, and that surmounted by a little ruffian of a monkey in a scarlet blouse. Just then, he rose to his feet and staggered abruptly forward, as a heavily weighted man is apt to do when he suddenly over-balances himself. Somerville's fractious chestnut shied with great violence against Miss Westervelt's animal, bearing him half round by sheer weight, and then dashed across the road in such headlong ponderous terror, that his rider could not prevent him from leaping a rail fence which divided us from a sunken meadow. The black caught the panic, and reared so violently, that Miss Westervelt nearly lost her saddle. As he came on all fours again, he discovered the unlucky musician, and, wheeling short on his haunches, went off like lightning down the stony, dangerous hill towards Seacliff.

"Catch her! stop her!" shrieked Genevieve, losing her presence of mind, and wildly backing her own animal; while, giving the whip to my beast, I bounded away at full speed after the fugitive, who by this time had gained a start of twenty rods, and was increasing it rapidly. A horse, running toward home, is not easily arrested short of it, so that I did not much hope that Miss Westervelt would be able to pull up before she reached Seacliff. I could see, indeed, that she was drawing vigorously on the bit, and even reducing her pace somewhat; and I took courage as I felt the steady, grey-hound stride of the bay under me, covering more than a rod at a bound, and lessening the gap at every double: but in another moment the black's bridle-rein flew out in a single strand and swung under his feet, broken, useless. I knew at once that Miss Westervelt had

lost all command over him, and I prayed only that she might be able to cling for one minute more to her saddle. Her horse now leaped out with all the power that lay in his fine lathy quarters, and, though he ran very irregularly, reeling from one side of the road to the other, he still ran with terrific swiftmess. Frightened as he was, however, lightly weighted as he was, wiry, game, and spirited, he was no match for the bay. His lean, light neck stretched to its full length, his delicate muzzle pointed low, his thin mane flying like a pennon of victory, my noble creature swept over the ground with long elastic leaps, hardly jarring me in the saddle, never jerking, never swerving, running as straight as the flight of an arrow, and as stanch as a thorough-bred racer. In less than half a minute, the black's lead of twenty rods had been reduced to as many yards, and in ten seconds more the bay was neck and neck with him. I lapped him on the left, notwithstanding the risk of sheering against Miss Westervelt, partly because I saw the broken rein flying loose on that side, and partly because I wanted my right hand for the approaching struggle. It had been easy to overtake him, but it looked perilously difficult to stop him. From the moment that my horse challenged him, he ran faster than ever, struggling with all the pluck in his little body, and staggering so wildly in his worry and eagerness, that, had I not forged ahead of him in a couple of strides, Miss Westervelt would have been badly bruised between his flank and the bay's. As I passed his quivering muzzle, he flung it up in such a way that I was able to catch the swinging end of the rein and grasp it firmly. Now came the task of drawing in my own horse, so delicately as to get him and keep him a little behind the runaway's lead, yet not have the strip of leather wrenched from my hold by any sudden plunge of either animal forward or sideways. Of course I succeeded; the true prince always succeeds on such occasions; if he did not, the world would be as dissatisfied as he. The black's nose swerved toward me, while his body swerved from me, until

he ran at a disadvantage; and in a hundred yards more, his violent flight had fallen to a jerking, rearing canter, only dangerous by its irregularity. Still doubting my power to check him altogether, I called out, "Jump!"

Miss Westervelt leaped to the ground, fell once, but rose instantly and ran to the roadside. Free now to pursue my controversy with blackie, regardless of anybody's safety but my own, I soon brought him to terms, and consigned him to the hands of a stout farmer boy who came up from a neighboring field. Dismounting hurriedly, and tying the bay to a tree, I ran back to Miss Westervelt. She sat, or reclined rather, on a bank by the road, her cap fallen off, her beautiful hair disordered, her head resting on her palm, her elbow on the turf, and her face so pale that I hastened to her, more alarmed than I had been during the heat of the mad escapade. She did not change her posture as she saw me coming, but she lifted one hand to me with a beautiful gesture of gratitude, and her one sweet word was, "Thank you!"

I bent over her;—I dared to 'ake the small trembling fingers;—I dared to kiss them once, twice, passionately.

"Thank you," she said again. "Thank you, my dear friend."

"Oh, God bless you!" I cried. "I am glad I had strength given me to do it."

I had found out *which* of the Misses Westervelt it was that had brought me to Seacliff, that had kept me there, and that could keep me there during life. It was a blessed discovery to me, but I am afraid that the great world will not properly appreciate it. Let us say no more on the subject, for if I give myself full speech, I shall appear like a fool to that large and respectable class of people whose hearts cannot keep step with other men's, and whose ideas, like the works of a watch, are always tightly encased in the precious metals.

Horses' feet were heard now, furious. trampling the road

behind us; and looking round, we saw Genevieve coming at full speed, closely followed by Somerville.

"You are not hurt, Miss Westervelt?" asked the latter, when he reached us. "Did you stop him, Mr. Fitz Hugh? Then you did a hard thing."

Genevieve sprang from her horse, and covered Mary's face with kisses and tears. Turning to me at last, she thanked me over and over again, with a very humility of fervor, which, I felt assured, was partly prompted by a remorseful remembrance of her late unsociability. Presently I shifted Miss Westervelt's saddle on to the bay, and we mounted again, but only to canter slowly back to Sealiff.

Immediately on our arrival, my gallantry was promulgated in the most flattering manner, through the well-oiled and melodious trumpet of Somerville. He praised me so delicately and gracefully, he threw in such a humorous allegro concerning his own forced escapade into the meadow, he sounded the danger of Miss Westervelt in such pathetic notes, that he actually appeared to better advantage in telling the story than I in being the hero of it. Certainly, it is an enviable thing to be an accomplished man of the world, never at a loss for a bow, a smile, a good saying, and a compliment. Seated as I was in the state-coach of my illustrious deed, I could not help feeling belittled by the presence of Somerville, even while he had the air of walking uncovered before me, and of blowing. "Hail to the chief who in triumph advances!" But my friends were not quite charmed by him into an entire forgetfulness of my merits. Mrs. Westervelt thanked me, and pressed my hands with such a simple, natural warmth of feeling, as melted away all her waxen affectations, and made her seem for a moment like a deep-souled, earnest woman.

"Be mod—est now, Mr. Fitz Hugh," whispered Mrs. Van Leer. "You have a claim on my cousin, but don't ask too much. You gentlemen are so *exigeant*!"

"Brayvo! your'e a trump, Mary," said Henry Van Leer,

more stirred than was his heavy wont. "Glad you kept such a stiff upper lip. Little hoss run like a lamplighter; did he? Wish I'd been there to see it. Brayvo for the bay! he's a regular flyer, and no mistake. I wish my hoss hadn't bolted, though; it would have been such a pretty race! I say, Fitz Hugh, I'll run my hoss against the bay with you for anything you want to name, and me the heaviest weight."

One other person took upon himself to be so officiously and boisterously grateful for my salvatory exploit, that he gave me a sensation of uneasiness unpleasantly akin to jealousy. This was my beefy crony, Robert Van Leer, who clamored about me like a happy earthquake, fairly astonishing me by the volubility which took the place of his usual aptitude for silence. If my Egyptian mummy should clap me on the shoulder, and enter into an animated discourse concerning his eternal obligations to me for delivering him from the catacombs, I should not be much more surprised than I was at this garrulous outburst of emotion in Robert.

"Oh, Fitz Hugh! my dear feller!" he roared, dragging me to one side so that he could shake my arms off without being interrupted. "I thank you,—I do, old feller,—from the bottom of my heart. I say, I'm so glad you was there to put in and help her, that I don't know whether I'm on my head or heels."

Miss Westervelt blushed, and hurried out of the room, muttering something about changing her dress. The other ladies followed; Mrs. Westervelt and Genevieve smiling in an embarrassed way; Mrs. Van Leer laughing outright with gay malice. The light-hearted, heavy-brained youth noticed them no more than if they had been thistle-downs blowing by, and kept right onward in his boisterous, thankful eloquence.

"I tell you, Fitz Hugh, Bob Van Leer's your friend, from this time forward and forever. If there's anything in the

... and I hate you, old rascal
ping my numbed fingers, and beginning
on the back in a paroxysm of athl
hanged if I meant to, and I'm sorry,
you see, I didn't know what I was ab
glad you went in and saved her, that
over. Come right up to my room
brandy; you must want it, my dea
close by hers, and I want to be in it n
was near her, you know. By Jove!
yet that she's safe there, and not c
Come up, and perhaps we'll hear her t
her there, of mornings; her voice sou
angel-like, you know; only the blasted
I can't understand a word she says."

May you get your neck broke,
thought, as I stared him in the eyes
made poor return for his gaze of aff
would run away with you to Patagonia
favor. What do you mean by your
gratitude? Room opposite hers, whe
voice of mornings! oh, good heavens!

I declined the offer of brandy, and r

his heart was fairly astride of his tongue now, and he had more to say than I found agreeable to hear.

"I suppose, Fitz Hugh," he ran on,—“in fact I've no doubt you are puzzled why I should be so much obliged to you for saving Miss Mary. It isn't for every woman that I'd thank you in this way,—no, no! If half the girls I'm acquainted with should get flung, and break their bones, whalebones and all, I wouldn't care much. But Miss Mary, you see, is different to me.”

She was indeed so different, that his bass voice trembled, and his great brown eyes filled with tears as he suddenly turned his face from me.

“Yes, she's *very* different,” he resumed, and then added, after searching for a word which could faintly express his emotions,—“*tremendously* different. Fitz Hugh, I'll—I'll tell you all about it.”

“No, don't,” said I, hardly knowing whether to laugh or get angry. “Don't make *me* your confidant. If you are in love with her,—if that is what you are going to say,—don't swear *me* to any secrecy or good faith on the subject. I may take a fancy to fall in love with her myself.”

“You fall in love with her!” he laughed. “She wouldn't have you. Why, I've known her ever since she was a child; and then my cousin is married to her father. I always liked her, even when I was a little chug—always! But I never felt particular towards her,—not *different*, you understand,—till she got grown up and wore long dresses. I tell you, when she went to Europe, it cut into me dreadfully, and I wanted to go along with them. But I couldn't; father was alive then, and *would* put me through College. It took me an awful long while to graduate, Fitz Hugh,” he parenthesized, with a sigh of weariness at the recollection; “it took me six years to scuffle through, when other fellows, you know, do it mostly in four. It almost wore me out, Fitz Hugh, and I've been resting my head ever since. Well, when she came back, full-blown and handsomer than ever, and all dressed up

in Paris rig, and speaking ever so many foreign languages, French and what-not, a blasted sight easier than I could read Latin with a grammar and dictionary,—when she came back so,—as she is now,—you may believe that that put a finisher to me. I'll be hanged if I didn't fall in love at first sight. I tell you, Fitz Hugh,—in confidence, you understand,—that I'm bound up in that girl; and they all know it, every one of them; the old man knows it, and Mary knows it. You see, the old man, (I mean Mary's father,—not Westervelt, senior, who's as rich as Cræsus,) the old man would be glad to get both his daughters off his hands. He's short of funds almost always; has to shin it a good deal, they say, to get along; and he's borrowed a few thousands of me under extra pinches in the money market. The fact is, he depends on me to help him out of a speculation, now and then; and so, naturally, he feels uncommon friendly and anxious for a closer acquaintance; do you take? Well, now, Fitz Hugh—by Jove, old feller! here's an idea,—suppose you take Genevieve; then, there's both the girls settled at once. By Jove! I never thought of that before, but it's a good egg. What do you say, old boy?"

"But it seems to me that Somerville is a favorite with Miss Genevieve," I replied, not anxious to commit myself to his proposition. "I couldn't trump such a player as he. It seems to me that I am out of the game."

"Somerville be hanged!" observed Bob. "No, he ain't a favorite with Genevieve, neither, and he don't want to be. I don't know what he comes here for. I sometimes wish he'd stay away, for he's too confounded elegant and insinuating to please me; but Sis (that is Henry's wife) thinks he's ever so fine a feller, and will have him invited. Don't you be afraid of Somerville. He's great family, I know,—tip-top aristocratic; but his father has turned him off,—cut him completely,—don't give him a cent. He hasn't the first solitary red; and Westervelt couldn't afford a poor son-in-law. Now I'm just the sort that he can afford; for father left me and

Henry a cool two hundred thousand a-piece. I an't bragging, Fitz Hugh, that an't my way, I assure you ; but I want to let you know just how things stand."

"Well ! now, my dear man !" said I, suddenly assuming a serious air, which, in point of fact, well befitted my feelings,—"do you mean to say that you are engaged to Miss Westervelt ?"

"Engaged !" he repeated, with an earnest, troubled stare, as if the idea of a formal betrothal were new to him, and at the same time daunted him by its delicate difficulties. "Do you mean engaged with a ring, and all that ? Why, I haven't exactly pinned her down to it ;—I haven't kissed her, nor anything of that sort, you know. But then—why, it's all as good as settled, I reckon, Fitz Hugh," he added, brightening up again. "Mrs. Westervelt is my cousin, and of course agreeable ; and as for the old man, I know he's delighted at the idea ; he as much as told me so when he borrowed the last batch of money."

"Oh !" returned I, with a sigh of relief, which would have gone far to make him throw a chair at my head, could he have understood it. Mary had not pledged her word to this fellow ; that I felt certain of, and that was ecstasy.

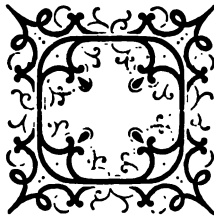
"And so, Fitz Hugh," concluded Bob, who had been retracing the thread of his discourse to discover why he had begun it,—“so you see what it is makes me so grateful to you. I wish I could have saved her in your place ; but, for all that, I say again, thank you !”

"Very good," I returned. "Much obliged to you in a small way. Now, then, take yourself off, or I shall invite you to eat dinner with me, and you know that you are not fond of boiled beef and greens."

His face shining with happy abstraction, he lounged away, making my stairs creak despairingly under his cumbrous descent. For a little while I felt as if his heavy footstep were on my heart also. The possibility that this coarse, earthy creature might climb on his pile of filthy lucre up to

my cloud-casile, break into it with the aid of Mr. Westervelt, and make prize of the "rare and radiant maiden" whom I had just hidden there, was altogether too terrifying to be contemplated calmly in the seesaw repose of my rocking-chair. I rose and walked about the room uncertainly, from side to side, from corner to corner, very nearly as unhappy as if I had not saved Miss Westervelt, and she had suffered some grievous harm. Then the recollection of the rescue intervened and swept me off into a comforting reverie, half sentimental, half amusing. I had met a beautiful lady in alien lands;—I had lost her among awful mountain gleams and thick vapors;—I had tracked her over multitudinous billows, and found her once more;—I had seen her flying in extremest peril, with death following hard after;—I had spurred a fiery steed to her succor and saved her, regardless of my own life; and now I seemed justified before all men in demanding her eternal love as my guerdon. This was romance; this was what I had read of; this was what I had often fancied. What youth old enough to wear a dress coat, has not a hundred times, in his imagination, delivered this or that lovely girl from the jaws of death, and then, without further trouble, or any danger of refusal, claimed her grateful heart, to accept or reject it as he chose? Yes, the adventure was a realization of one of my boyish dreams, and all the more astonishing for that very reason, because so few of those same dazzling visions had ever been verified. It was not a novelty in some respects, certainly: the idea was trampled threadbare centuries ago by a crowd of poets and romancers; the Perseuses have been saving the Andromedas ever since the days of the Greeks, and earlier; the brave deserved the fair, I doubt not, in the good old times when Cain built the first city; but, nevertheless, I have observed that such things rarely happen to people of my acquaintance. I declare frankly, though with proper shame, that Miss Westervelt is the only lady that I ever rescued from anything like mortal peril. I shall have no more such glorious exploits to boast

of, and I hope therefore that the reader will permit me to talk of this at my pleasure. He may have multitudinous flocks of such incidents in his mind or even in his history ; but I warn him that this is my one ewe lamb, and that I shall make a woful outcry if I am robbed of it.





CHAPTER VII.

A MOTHER IN ISRAEL, AND TWO SONS OF BELIAL.

GVER since the commencement of authentic history, at least, men have been pretty punctual at dinner, whatever might be their passions and aspirations, their joys and their sorrows. Fixed times for meals are one proof of civilization; it is only animals, children, Hottentots, and other savages, who eat at any and every hour of the day; and so, in my character as citizen of an enlightened republic, I obeyed Ma Treat's prandial summons, although not hungry.

My respected foster-parents, their chubby grandchild, and I, just filled the four sides of a small cherry table, spread now with a clean brown linen cloth, and laden with fried fish, boiled corned beef, boiled greens, baked potatoes, lettuce, and dried-apple pie. Pa Treat asked a blessing in his usual stammering style, but with an uncommon tremor of emotion. Before long, I observed that Johnny was staring at me in even more reverential wonder than ordinary, and that Ma Treat's moon-like, silver-bowed spectacles shone upon me with an unusual effulgence of affectionate pride and interest.

"Ah, Lewy!" said the good creature, at last, "we know all about it, and you needn't keep so silent and secret. I do bless God sincerely that he spared your life, and that he gave you strength to save that dear child's life. Oh, Lewy! a horse is a vain thing for safety; Psalms, thirty-third, seven-

teenth; and I'm afraid whenever I see anybody trust one; and I do say that it's one of the greatest mercies of Heaven——”

Here her voice broke down and crumbled away to an indistinct whimper; she drew out her handkerchief, smothered her emotions, and wiped her spectacles.

“That's so,” coincided Pa Treat; “not that all hosses are quite so awful; but a runaway is the dragon.”

“Oh, it wasn't so serious an affair as you imagine,” observed I, a trifle flattered, however, at the immediate spread of my fame. “But who was in such a hurry to tell you of it?”

“Why, I just went up to the great house, to show them Irish helps of Mrs. Westervelt's how to bake an Injun puddin',” said Ma Treat. “Stupid, awkward, catholic creecturs they are to be sure; and I wish they'd stay in their own popish countries and worship their saints to home. But Mrs. Westervelt, she was down in the kitchen, and she let me know the whole story, and she told it real handsome too, Lewy, with her heart in her mouth. I declare I was so scared, and proud, and glad, and grateful, I like to cried right in the puddin'. Says I, Mrs. Westervelt, says I, I don't wonder at it a bit, says I, for he was the finest, handsomest, strongest, best-hearted baby that ever was, and it's just like him; yes, Mrs. Westervelt, says I, it's just what I should have expected of him, for I nursed him, and I know exactly what a nater he had, says I. Mrs. Westervelt she nodded and looked as amiable as pie, as much as to say that she was glad to hear it. And now, furthermore, Mrs. Westervelt, says I, if Miss Mary don't take a liking to him, and say Yes just as soon as he asks the question, I say that she's an unnatural, ungrateful girl, not worth paying any attention to, and ought to die an old maid, says I. Mrs. Westervelt she smiled, and says she, I think he ought to stand a good chance. Yes she did, Lewy; you needn't laugh so; she said just that, and looked as though she could say a sight more;

only she wouldn't, I suppose, for fear it would seem like courting you right out."

"But, Ma Treat, what if you have been spoiling my chances!" was my answer. "I fancy that young ladies dislike to be dictated to in love affairs. They want their matches made in heaven, unsuspected by their earthly fellow creatures, and not certainly known even to themselves until the decisive moment. They like to move in a mysterious way, and not have the world pointing out their goal. You will surely ruin my prospects with Miss Westervelt if you keep on as you have begun. She won't bear being told that I am to win her without an effort. Depend upon it, that, like other handsome girls, she means to be loved long and well before she loves back. Don't you see that you have been setting up her pride against me?"

"Not a bit of it, Lewy,—not one bit of it, I tell you," responded Ma Treat resolutely, but looking a little alarmed. "No, Lewy, she ought to govern her pride, and favor you because you deserve it, without thinking any such foolish nonsense as you've been talking of. However, I won't say nothing more about it up there; not another word, Lewy. You shan't say that I go a-doing you mischief."

Ma Treat was touched, but I did not attempt to soften her annoyance, because I wanted to keep her well-meaning, voluble tongue under bonds of discretion. For the present her feelings found vent in lecturing Master Johnny. That hearty youngster, moved doubtless by original sin, had already devoured two platefuls of greens, and being refused a third, stuck out his under lip silently but vindictively.

"Johnny! Johnny!" said Ma Treat with exceeding glumness, "take in that under lip; pull it right in or I shall snap it. Oh, Johnny! Johnny! how often has granma told you to govern your temper! and Johnny don't do it. It's your wicked, sinful heart, Johnny, that sticks out your lip. As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is; Proverbs, twenty-third, seventh. It's the original sin of your wicked nater; that's

the trouble, Johnny; and not because you haven't had greens enough. Now eat your potato, and try to put down your naughty heart. See! Mr. Fitz Hugh is looking at you, and granpa is looking at you, and granma is looking at you, and the angels are looking at you, and they all feel sorry to see your sinful disposition."

Johnny slowly sucked in his rebellious lip; his eyes rose dolefully to mine, and dropped in profound humiliation; he swallowed his potato and his spunk together. The one sorrow of this healthy urchin's life, was the excessive difficulty of being a good boy. To attain this distinction, at least in the estimation and according to the teachings of his grandmother, it was necessary to undergo labors and trials compared with which a barefooted pilgrimage round the world would have been a trifle. He must be blameless in deed, word, and thought; eschew alike sins of commission and sins of omission; resist the world, the flesh, and the devil; love all Orthodox Christians, indiscriminately; desire vehemently the conversion of the heathen; set much store by the restoration of the Jews to Canaan; understand the prophecies, and take an interest in their fulfilment; anticipate with perpetual longing and gladness the coming of the millennium; besides several minor duties, such as hankering after his catechism, keeping Sunday, and obeying his grandparents. All these excellent works, moreover, he was to perform, not because he liked to be obliging, not out of any good natural instincts, but from the most mystical and spiritual, the most unchildlike, the most unearthly of motives. And finally, when all was said and done, he was to get no manner of praise for it, because he was still a miserable, detestable victim of the original sin entailed upon him by his remote ancestor, Adam. In fact his intrinsic and necessary wickedness was enforced upon him by his grandmother, with a theological rigor, and, as it were, ferocity, which appeared to leave him small hopes of ever becoming anything better than a perfected scapegrace. She represented him as buried

... anything, Johnny's
both for this world and the world
the fiendish wickedness which s
him, Ma Treat, by some strange
ingly fond of Johnny; and if the
stairs, or had an indigestion, she
even cried over him as if she were
It was a curious commentary on h
divinity, and showed that the same
rather than by her heart. In tru
woman, full of natural affection and
ity, notwithstanding the grim uns
she reasoned up to her New Englan

By the way, I am inclined to thi
ology has some connection with ou
climate. If there is no spiritual sy
a picturesque similarity of effect, b
dogmas and our savage winters, bet
aspirations and our resplendent an
can a population be equable and n
its thermometer is perpetually ragin
tremes? With our rheumatic spr
have been tempted to damn infants

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is, not all the time. He only wanted a little more of it—eye-call-it. Cherk up, Johnny; there'll be another to-morrow. You shan't want for something to put in ingumbob (stomach?)”

Treat could no more call up the right word by land or sea; and he had all sorts of unimaginable titles for the various table utensils. In his nomenclature a knife was called by a tomahawk; a candlestick, a lightning-rod; the owl, the old hat; butter, goose grease, or ponatum; a rocking-chair, old sneezer; the mantel ornaments, jigsaw.

The world seemed to acquire a new aspect when he spoke of its details.

Unless the reader has already noticed, with proper attention, Ma Treat's ready quotations of Scripture. Perhaps it seems somewhat ill-natured in me to hint that there is a little harmless pretence in this fluent repetition of words and this careful reference to chapter and verse. After being long for a week or so at her extraordinary memory, she appeared to comprehend the entire Bible in all its minutiae, and discovered that she used the same passages over and over and that most of them were drawn from the Book of Proverbs, of which the chief, pungent antitheses stick so fast to the mind. There was no meant deception, however; it was unconscious, harmless, and sprang from the best motives; the fruit of vanity, it may be, but not of hypocrisy. The world does not, perhaps, care to be enlightened in the moral and social peculiarities of my foster-grand, if it good-naturedly takes any interest at all in it. It would very likely prefer to see me hurry up to the

down In Memoriam, with which I had been preparing for a great lyric effort in conversation, I climbed the bluff, strolled through the thicketed garden, and entered the open front door without ringing. It was no novelty, no liberty, this; for I had done it repeatedly before, and by the invitation of Mrs. Westervelt: but it led me into another adventure of unintentional eavesdropping. Finding the parlor empty, I lounged up to the copy of the Cenci, and amused myself with studying out the points of resemblance between it and Genevieve. Suddenly I heard earnest voices and hasty footsteps in the back boudoir; it was a rush and murmur as if one person was following and urgently imploring another; it ended when the door jarred open and closed again behind Somerville. Flushed, excited, hurried, like a man escaping from reproaches or importunities, he came in alone, muttering a curse between his teeth, and, not seeing me, stopped by a window to wrap up some bright object in a handful of lace. He was not so quick but that I caught the gleam of gold and the prismatic flash of diamonds.

What does this mean? I thought. Does my elegant friend indulge in the eccentricity of pilfering, and rob his hosts in the very peace and sanctity of after-dinner? That is a lady's bracelet, and I would swear that I heard the rustle of a lady's dress in the boudoir. It is not Mr. Henry Van Leer, then, who is the hero of these mysterious bullyings; it is our mild and mellifluous exemplar, Somerville. But who is the lady? Mrs. Van Leer? I will watch, and discover.

I tapped the floor with a boot-heel to warn Somerville of my presence, but did not feel in the least bound to keep my eyes from his face, or otherwise humor his supposed evil conscience. If he had been guilty of any ungentility, his air, as he turned to me, was the very apothecosis and sublimity of impudence. He was quite able to endure my stare; he neither started nor stammered under it; he simply nodded, and smiled a friendly good-afternoon.

“A broken ornament, which I am to get repaired in New

York," he added, as he dropped the valuable package into his breast-pocket. "The ladies will be mortified to find that you have been left alone. They are full of admiring gratitude for your heroism, I assure you. Mrs. Van Leer has just had a quarrel with me because I threatened to repeat her last compliment on Mr. Fitz Hugh. Of course, she carried her point, and I had to promise secrecy."

Mrs. Van Leer! thought I. Thank you for telling me so much. I understand now who is the lady of the boudoir. As for the *cause* of the quarrel, my friend, I fancy that you would hardly swear for such a trifle as you mention.

"Very hard and uncharitable in Mrs. Van Leer to deny me such a gratification," I said, aloud. "But where is Miss Westervelt? I hope she has not suffered at all from her escapade."

"A little more than she chose to confess at first. Good pluck the girl has; but nerves and pluck are separate things. Ladies will have their faint turns, you know; and she had to drink her camphor-water and go to bed. That is why you were not sent for to dinner. At the risk of committing flattery, I must tell you that she insisted on staying up to receive you, and that I had to use all my authority, as the senior gentleman of the family, to make her retire. So don't be surprised to hear Mrs. Van Leer call me Doctor Somerville. I want to forestall her satire."

By this time my mind was somewhat drawn away from that incident of the bracelet. I was gratefully titillated by the compliments which Somerville had contrived to stick into me, while I was somewhat indignant at the jesting tone in which he had spoken of Miss Westervelt's faint turn, and still more at his exerting any domination over her, especially such as tended to keep her out of my way. He might have acted for the best in his interference, but it was not pleasant to know that he dared interfere. Of course, I did not make myself ridiculous by either looking or uttering my annoyance: I simply twisted my moustache with a nonchalant air, and

asked him if he did not think Mrs. Van Leer clever; yes, I twisted my moustache, and surveyed myself in the glass as if I didn't care a straw for Mrs. Van Leer or any other woman.

The entrance of the lady referred to prevented Somerville from replying to my question. Within two or three minutes thereafter, her husband and his brother, Genevieve and Hunter made their appearances successively, while Miss Westervelt sent excuses, thanks, and a promise to see me to-morrow. The conversation was general and just tolerably uninteresting. I spent some little time in furtively watching Mrs. Van Leer and Somerville, and finally left the house none the wiser for my sidelong investigations, but followed by a brood of harassing doubts and suspicions which vexed me sorely in my lonely chamber.

One thing was perfectly clear, and that was that I had made a great mistake in my brief life at Sencliff. Taking it for an *opera comique*, I had whirled round the stage dancing and smiling like a crowned bacchanal, when all the while it was a tragic theatre in which some grave mystery or woful drama was evolving. Suddenly my festive garland had been torn from my head; a word of dark, weighty significance had been whispered in my ear; and I had become sensible of the solemnity of the place and time.

The longer I thought of the secret understanding or misunderstanding which evidently existed between Mrs. Van Leer and Somerville, the more momentous it appeared. She was just the vain, light-headed, flippant-tongued flirt that one naturally expects to find astray, when the world's busy bellman, Rumor, goes about the streets crying, Lost! As for him, he was, or at least seemed to my young eyes, a cool, adroit, brilliant man of the world, a perfect master of flattery, a connoisseur of the female heart, as handsome in person as he was molish in manner, and in short, the ideal of a woman-killer and *cavalier servente*. Whether his morals were bad I did not know, although since the afternoon I

SEACLIFF.

But why was he so harsh and men-
Leer, or whomsoever else may have
man of the boudoir? What was the
et which he had torn away with vio-
Would he condescend to torment a
of her trinkets? Had he quarrelled
and demanded back some pledge of
; he jealous of this ornament because
y another? What? Why? Who?
d of perplexing questions, and found

my enigma, I became quite indignant
h a questionable intrigue should exist
with so much purity.' Who should
to the painful contradiction? I was
r to do it; the Van Leers' were too
nter too feather-brained; the lady of
rvate; the girls were too young. I
ervelt as the only possible champion
at least, endangered sanctity of the
the house, husband, father, church-
istocrat, his was the right to sweep
d this spider's nest of scandal. I re-
sure, as a small, frail, light-complex-
, very neat in dress and fastidious in
id of dirt and dirty people, and pain-
hing porters, baggage-masters, hack-
ll hale, sanguineous, muscular person-
ans had he impressed me as a heroic
my confidence in case of emergency,

hold throne. He was to come home next day, and I might trust in his presence to turn the troublesome mystery out of doors.

But would he discover the intrigue? Had any one but myself appeared to discover it? This last question had not hitherto occurred to me, and it staggered my suspicions, for if Somerville and Mrs. Van Leer were not doubted by the members of the family in which they lived, I might be very wrong in doubting them. Well, I would still be watchful, but I would be cautious, silent, charitable. There is no more common mark of a mean soul, no more certain index of low instincts, if not of low breeding, than to question, on slight grounds, the moral worth of our fellow-creatures. Besides, the subject was a disagreeable one, and I hated to think of it seriously.

There was still another bugbear looming in my future. The two facts, that Mr. Westervelt needed rich sons-in-law, and that Bob Van Leer was worth two hundred thousand dollars, frightened me not a little when I had fairly surveyed them in unison; they made up a very gigantic and horrible scarecrow, which to the eyes of my imagination towered grimly on the brow of Seacliff, and seemed to say to my heart, as it circled longingly about the place, "Don't try to light here, you vagabond!" Would Miss Westervelt marry for money? was an impertinent question which presented itself. I rejected that hypothesis with indignant negation, but admitted lugubriously that she might marry to save her father. What man in my condition of spirit would not have wasted at least an hour in running over the list of his effects, and speculating as to how he could double, treble, quadruple the modest aggregate? How could I quickest change thirty thousand dollars into two hundred thousand? I thought of operating in stocks, of buying western lands, of hunting up a mine, of digging for Kidd's treasure, of begging a government contract, of trying a lottery ticket, of importing a cargo of Shanghae roosters. "Let me be quickly rich,"

said Ortogrul ; 'let the golden stream be swift and violent.'” I would have been willing to go early to bed and early to rise for the remainder of my life, if it would certainly have made me wealthy, according to the blessed promise of the proverb.

Finally, in my aspirations after riches, I bethought me of a certain good genius, whom I had hitherto intended as my guide only to fame. For the sake of a woman, that greatest of tempters, I resolved to turn Literature into a gold-digger, and make her slave in Demas's filthy mine, instead of leading me through some æsthetic land of Beulah toward the shining towers of Fame's Eternal City. In the first place, Messrs. Bookworm and Binder should immediately, and without any further nonsense, publish MY BOOK. I made a calculation, that, if they could but sell the certainly conceivable number of one hundred thousand copies, the profits therefrom would go far toward making me acceptable to a needy father-in-law, while the literary glory would be sure to win the daughter. I believe that many a young fellow, who, after all, is not particularly vain, has some such delusion concerning the possibilities of his first book. I wrote to Messrs. Bookworm and Binder ;—I besought them to let me loose at once on the public ;—I exhorted them not to be afraid of summer as a bad season for sales ; in short I tried to communicate to them some of my own enthusiasm concerning myself. The publishing matter arranged, and no other short and easy way to riches seeming to be just then open, I went to bed immediately, and to sleep as soon as might be.



CHAPTER VII.

MR. WESTERVELT.

OF course I could not let the next morning pass away without seeing Miss Westervelt. I meant to speak warmly; to rejoice frankly in having delivered her from peril; to claim by some subtle word an interest in that life which I had perhaps preserved; to attempt boldly to read a secret in her eyes, careless whether my own revealed one; to touch her hand with a pressure which should demand recognition and answer. I set off for Seacliff with a brow as elate and a step as light, as if the crown of wealth and the wings of fame which I had proposed to win were already mine. A few moments of lonely waiting in the parlor dispelled this cheerful illusion, and made me sensible that I had not mounted above the doubts and diffidences of ordinary humanity. Presently a sweet rustle of dress,—a fragrance of silken sound,—a descent without foot-falls,—told me that Miss Westervelt was coming; and my heart began to beat as if it meant to finish its threescore years and ten in as many minutes.

“Mr. Fitz Hugh,—I am so obliged to you! I shall never forget what I owe you,” she said, putting out her hand timidly.

“You are very kind. I am glad that—that I have been able to do you a service,” I replied, taking the soft and pliant fingers, only to let them slide quietly away from me.

How stagnant, and frigid, and mean, often are the words

that a man utters at the very moment when his nature is stirred most passionately. Deep down in the dungeons of the soul, in the "black hole" of the heart, the imprisoned emotions are wrestling and shrieking for air; but no sound of the agony penetrates the dumb walls, and the placid, dissembling jailer at the gate babbles of the news and the weather. My face, I believe, was respectably calm, and I am sure that what I said would not have startled the attention of a stranger. I misplaced some words: her eyes dropped as she gently answered; and that was all there was of visible emotion. How often it happens thus! The moment of moments,—the moment that of all we most longed for and cherished in anticipation,—it arrives at last, and we are so paralyzed that we cannot stretch out our hands to improve it. The carrier-dove of opportunity appears in the distance; it circles over our heads and alights with soft flutter of loving wings on our shoulders; it rises into the clouds again, and we have neither secured its message nor charged it with an answer.

How differently from me would Somerville have behaved and talked, and how differently he did talk when he entered the room five minutes after Miss Westervelt! I was a mere militiaman, awkward in manœuvre, and subject to panics, compared with this disciplined mercenary of society, drilled from childhood in the manual exercise of politeness, proof against every surprise, master of every feint and stratagem. Blandly and dulcetly he prated away the time until the whole family had gathered in the parlor. Humbled at my inferiority, and vexed that I had let slip my golden chance, I was more silent than usual, notwithstanding that Mrs. Van Leer seated herself by me and opened a coquettish chatter which should have been enough to win small-talk from a fossil ichthyosaurus.

"Mary!" she called, at last, "Mr. Fitz Hugh is melancholy this morning. He thinks that he hasn't been fairly rewarded, I suppose; and he is quite right. You haven't

done anything that young ladies in novels usually do to their preservers. Get the picture now; let him see what is coming."

"You naughty creature!" says the blushing Mary. "I told you not to speak of that till it was done, and not even then. That was my right."

"Well, go and get it now," returned Mrs. Van. "I have spoilt your surprise, you see, and there is no use in keeping half a secret."

Miss Westervelt left the room for a moment, and returned with a drawing-book, from which she produced, with the usual maidenly flutterings, a crayon sketch, spirited though unfinished, representing our runaway adventure. The moment chosen was the very crisis of the rescue; both horses rearing magnificently; the black foaming in the background; the bay on the near side, half a length behind; the lady bending forward as if shaken in her seat by the sudden check of speed; the champion clutching the broken rein with a sublime indifference to his equilibrium. The picture was not yet half completed, but enough was done to show a respectable talent at composition, and the animals, in particular, were remarkably lifelike and vigorous.

"It is beautiful,—it is wonderful!" I exclaimed, with an earnestness of gratification which brought a burst of laughter from Mrs. Van Leer. "But really it is well done," I asserted, reddening consciously. "The horses are perfect. Why, Miss Westervelt, you will make Rosa Bonheur shake in her horseshoes."

"Ah! you suspected me,—you have found me out," she said. "The horses I could not do; and so I copied them, separately, out of some engravings that I will show you. But I did the grouping, and you shall see whether I can finish the human figures. I like drawing, and I faintly hope to design something original yet."

"No doubt you will; you are naturally a designing creature, Mary," observed Mrs. Van Leer.

"All women are," said her husband, and laughed tremendously at what he considered his joke.

Coloring a little, perhaps at Mrs. Van Leer's accusation, perhaps at my immense interest in the little picture, Miss Westervelt went to a window and fell to sketching industriously. I took my stand beside her, as might reasonably have been expected; for was not the drawing mine, and was not my portrait needed to its completeness? The white, plump hand, bold in touch, and flexile in movement, brooded over and quickened into warmer life its creations. It is a rare luxury, I imagine, that of seeing one's own likeness wrought out by the fingers that in all the world one holds the dearest; and I enjoyed something more than this even, for I discovered that Miss Westervelt could hit off my profile without glancing at me, as if transferring it from memory. Of course she flattered it, and of course I thanked her in my soul. But the devil is a malicious creature, ever anxious, they say, to disturb anything which reminds him of heaven; and he presently stirred up Mrs. Van Leer to throw her shadow and Somerville's over my enjoyment. Passing her arm through his in a pert, familiar way, which was particularly offensive when associated with my suspicions of her, she drew him to my side, obliging me to give her place, and watched with a knowing smile the process of filling in my portrait.

"Excellent!" said she. "Mr. Fitz Hugh's moustache to a hair; only the expression should be a little more worried; terrible anxiety for the lady, you know. But really, Mary, you must let Mr. Somerville sketch *your* face. He has a particular talent for taking ladies. I mean taking their likenesses, of course; nothing else. He has done my face and Mrs. Westervelt's to perfection. Come, cousin, let him try his hand on you, that's a dear girl."

"Not a stroke of it," replied I, positively. "I beg your pardon for the contradiction, Mrs. Van Leer; but every line of the drawing must be done by Miss Westervelt, or I refuse it."

"You see how unreasonable he is," said my artist, with a little laugh, which I thought indicated gratification.

"Well, I nev—er would permit a man to dictate in that style," observed Mrs. Van Leer, half piqued, half jesting. "You must not al—low it, Mary; it is encouraging the ugly sex in bad man—ners. Now, Mr. Somerville has been better taught; he is meekly, and to the smallest fragment of him, under my thumb; and to prove it he is going now to flirt in the library, quite away from Mr. Fitz Hugh's naughty example."

Oh, you brazen, affected, drawling flirt! I thought. I wish that your husband had sense enough to keep an eye on you. I wish that Mr. Westervelt would arrive and put a stop to this shameless trifling.

Just then the doorbell rang, and Genevieve ran to the front of the parlor, crying, "Papa! papa!"

Mr. Westervelt stood in the verandah, tapping on a window with his umbrella, and smiling at us through the plate-glass. Mary sprang from her seat, and flew into the hall to give him entrance. He came in presently, his arm around her waist, kissing her very fondly and calling her pet names, while she held up her drawing before his face, saying, "See there, papa; see what has happened to me."

"What is that, my child?" he asked, but immediately pushed it away to embrace Genevieve. Mrs. Westervelt had started up at sight of him, but had not advanced, and stood awaiting him with a strange air of hesitation, which was perfectly manifest, although of course, incomprehensible to me, who knew so little of his conjugal character. He did not notice it; seemed very glad to see her; kissed her and called her his dear Ellen. Her eye followed him with ill-concealed anxiety, until his gaze rested on the calm, smiling, handsome countenance of Somerville. She, too, has guessed the dark secret, I thought; she knows that she ought not to have let that wolf into the fold; she expects blame for her unfaithful watch and ward.

"How do you do, Mr. Westervelt?" said the wolf, coming forward and shaking the hand of the family chief with such a mien of respect, that it was like incense. "I have an impertinent air of welcoming you to your own house, sir. You will excuse it?"

"Certainly, certainly. You are very welcome. I hope you have been made comfortable, sir," murmured Mr. Westervelt, in a hesitating, troubled tone, as if half choked by the civilities which he felt compelled to utter.

I was now introduced to him, in form; for he seemed not to remember me.

"Oh!" said he,—“Mr. Fitz Hugh,—yes, we parted somewhere in—in Switzerland, I believe. Yes, yes, I remember now, perfectly. Excuse me for not recollecting you at once;—I am a little short-sighted. I hope that you have—have been very well, sir.”

My health during the very considerable space of time since our last meeting, had been excellent; and I told him so, with thanks for his inquiry, although I suspected that he set small store by the information. “I am glad,” he rejoined, bowing, “very glad to—to welcome you to my house, sir.”

“Thank you, sir. I have the pleasure of lodging near you, with your neighbour, Mr. Treat,” I replied, anxious to be received on my proper footing, and not as an intruder.

“Oh, you are not staying in the house? Well, we shall always be most happy to have you call, Mr.—Mr. Fitz Hugh.”

He now turned cordially to the Van Leers, addressing Robert, especially, with a warmth so almost paternal, that it annoyed me exceedingly. The salutations over, he begged to be excused, and went off to wash away the dust of his journey. I had studied him well, and felt disheartened: he was clearly, not the man for my imagined exigency; no match for Somerville, and hardly for Mrs. Van Leer. Since I left him shivering amidst the misty morning glories of the Righi, he had altered little, but altered for the worse, that is for the

weaker. He looked thinner, and frailer in body, more worn, more worried, more timorous in spirit, more incapable than ever of energetic resolve or execution. His dress, even taking into consideration a railroad trip of two hours, seemed careless; his thin, blonde faintly-silvered hair, hung in a disorder unknown of old even to diligences and glaciers; and, altogether, that halo of spruceness, which marked him in the earlier days of his second marriage, had faded sadly in glory. His tones had softened beyond their former hesitating softness; his mild eye rarely rose to your face, when he addressed you; or, if by chance it met yours, it dropped hastily.

He returned presently, followed by his daughters, who had run out to wait on him. Mrs. Van Leer, still keeping Somerville's arm, was promenading the parlor with a semi-polking step, and talking nonsense. Her husband and his brother occupied separate window-seats, whence they could stare at the Sound, and so enliven their heavy minds with the white sails which brightened and darkened as they tacked across its tremulous expanse. Miss Westervelt resumed her sketch, and Genevieve her embroidery. Mr. Westervelt seated himself on a sofa beside his wife, fidgeting there like a nervous visitor, and occasionally casting glances of timid inquiry at the passing and repassing Somerville. As for me, I had been captured by Mr. Hunter, who made me sail down the meandering frothy current of one of his tedious stories about himself; but in spite of his interminable stream of babble, and in spite of my efforts not to listen to what was not intended for my ears, I overheard the general purport of Mr. Westervelt's conversation. It consisted of sighing complaints concerning the hard times and the unprofitableness of business.

"But everybody else says that it is good times, papa, and that business is lively," observed Genevieve.

"Lively!" he returned with a groan. "It is lively, just as a cheese is lively when it is full of nibbling mice. The

stock gamblers and swindlers are lively, Jenny, and real honest business is suffering. Almost everybody that I can hear of,—almost everybody, I tell you,—has been making losses,—making losses in private that never get into the papers,—things that you don't hear of, Jenny. If the slightest pressure should come, multitudes of men would collapse who are supposed to be as sound and solid as granite. People are doing a great deal,—frightful amount of business,—but it is mostly out of pocket. It is perfectly astonishing how many houses I know of that are only keeping along,—preserving splendid appearances and keeping along,—that is all."

When a man has the dropsy, or the rheumatism, or the bronchitis, or the dyspepsia, it is incredible how many people he finds who are afflicted like unto himself; while his robust neighbor, whose juices are healthy, bones painless, throat sound, and digestion uniformly triumphant, is hardly aware that there is an invalid in all his acquaintance. Mr. Westervelt's ill-luck in business was a chronic affair, which led him into a wide sympathetic knowledge of other cases of financial decrepitude. Misery not only loves company, but usually finds plenty of it.

"But the papers say that there is plenty of money," persisted Genevieve. "I should think you must finally pick up some of it, papa, looking about as sharp as you do. I suppose that when a man has plenty of money he has good times."

"Ah! there is too much of it," he moaned. "Too much of it. Everything is inflated; everything is too high; the cost of living is frightful. I wish that you,—that you women could ever realize how much it takes to dress you. But that is what you never can be got to think of."

"But, papa, one bad speculation costs you more than all our dresses for all our lives," retorted Genevieve, with her accustomed acuteness. "What makes you speculate, papa?"

"You don't know what you are talking about, child," said

he, evidently bothered by the question. "Well, well, let's have done with the subject; let's have done with it."

Mr. Westervelt, like the majority of my respected fellow countrymen, was business-bitten. During the early part of my sojourn at Seacliff, money matters were the only thing on which he could talk fluently and earnestly. Say, "Stocks, in his hearing, and he turned upon you as full of excitement as a dog when you say, "S't-boy." Eager to get rich, eager to become independent of a father who bullied him, he had plunged into the sea of exchange gambling, without the coolness necessary to take advantage of its onsets, or the sanguine temperament fitted to bear its reverses. Whether lucky or unlucky, he was always low-spirited, and generally looked as if he had eight or ten notes out, lying among his bank accounts, like lighted bombshells in a magazine, as sure to blow him to atoms the moment their brief fuses were consumed.

In this matter of melancholy he was well paired with his wife, who often bore about a joyless look, which was not so much downright sorrow as disheartenment and calm weariness. Somewhere in her life, there seemed to be a dreary ache, of which she herself, perhaps, could not have explained the cause. It might have been the slow, dull oppression of delicate health, or it might have been the empty sadness which overtakes all frivolous natures when the first flush of youth leaves them and they are removed from their accustomed scenes of social gaiety. This depressed air gave him a fitful interest in my eyes, although I felt all the while that she was not worth a moment's serious study. Sometimes the veil lifted, and she was chatty, frolicsome, almost boisterous for a day or two together; then, without any apparent cause, it would redescend, silencing her puerile mirth, and draping her brow once more with its gauzy, deceptive romance.

Presently Mr. Westervelt lifted his eyes to his eldest daughter, and asked languidly, "What are you drawing there, Mary?"

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Oh! I comprehend," he added, glancing at Somerville. After a moment's hesitation, during which he looked particularly flurried and low-spirited, he addressed his wife in a whisper. "My dear, how comes he—how comes Mr. Somerville to be here?"

"Why, he is visiting us, papa," put in Genevieve suddenly, and almost tartly.

Mrs. Westervelt moved her lips, but made no reply that was audible, at least to me.

Mary bent lower over the drawing, and continued to work in silence.

"Ah—yes," sighed the husband and father, and let his head fall back languidly, with the air of a man who has been only half answered but dares not insist upon his inquiries. I felt actually angry with him as I noted his irresolute hands playing over and over each other, and his faded blue eyes wandering out of the window, as if seeking to avoid any possible cause of conflict within. If he wishes to prosecute the subject, why doesn't he? I thought. How can he, the master of the house, the head of the family, permit himself to be so disconcerted and checked by a spunky little slip of a youngest daughter? His home might become a nest of Lotharios and blacklegs, for all such a guardian as he.

This was not my first discovery, it will be remembered, that the beautiful Miss Genevieve had more spirit than was absolutely necessary to keep her sweet. Loving and lovable to her friends as long as they pleased her, the moment they contradicted her fancies, she could fly at them, be it sister or father, like a little tigress. At times she confessed, with delightful frankness, to having a high temper; but, like many other people similarly blessed, she rather thought it a convenient thing to have; and even, when not using it, she often kept it in sight and *in terrorem*, like a bully's bowie-knife peeping from his bosom.

Annoyed beyond measure at the upshot of the conversation, I paid my compliments and retired. Hurrying through

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CHAPTER IX.

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

WALKING up and down the beach in front of Pa Treat's, next morning, I writhed through a tormenting meditation on the character and circumstances of Mr. Westervelt. How unlucky, that of all the fathers of families in the United States, this particular one, with his empty exchequer, and woman heart, and baby muscles, should have fallen to the lot of the imperilled household of Seacliff! He needed wealth to keep him from under the pecuniary thumb of Robert Van Leer; he needed courage to render him a match for the cool, resolute, "interesting villain," Somerville; and here he was, poor in pocket and poor in spirit, a most inadequate and unsatisfactory domestic hero indeed. A voice at my back, young and impudent as the abrupt scream of a child's whistle, startled me from the thorny revery in which I was wandering.

"This is the prince of summer mornings, my dear fellow," crowed the debonair Hunter, skipping down the green bank behind me and clapping a patronizing hand on my shoulder, with the air of one who expounds the universe to some dull-eyed brother.

Here is the man whom I can profitably question about Mr. Westervelt, I reflected; here is the man who will tell me the truth, the whole truth, and, alas! a good deal more than the truth.

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five millions in the China trade, and has dispensed to his only son the miserable pittance of perhaps one hundred thousand dollars, in several remittances, all of which has been successively swallowed up by pecuniary reverses. Westervelt, senior, still wraps himself in his five millions, and looks on frigidly while Westervelt, junior, struggles with his circumstances."

He paused again, turned half round and fixed his shiny black eyes on my face to see whether I appreciated his antithesis.

Mr. Frederick William Hunter, as I ought to have stated long ago, was an under-graduate of the University of North America, a junior, by the rules of college, but an unchangeable and lifelong sophomore by the dispensations of Providence. Some men are born sophomores; remain sophomores until death, in spite of sheepskins and every other human circumstance; perhaps go into the next world and exist through the intermediate state as sophomores. He was a wise fool in the profoundest and truest sense of the compound. His memory was remarkable; he committed with enviable facility; he could spout long passages of Greek and Latin hexameter; he was equally familiar with the poetry of his own language; he wrote fluently, and was the most copious orator of his society debating-club; but in spite of all these things, he was incurably and inevitably ridiculous. In short, he was one of those remarkable persons who are undeniable fools, without being exactly underwitted. He had no prudence, no common sense, and no modesty, except the mock species. His lying was so brazen and barefaced, so extravagant, unnecessary, and purposeless, that it would have been disgusting, had it not been done with a certain curious taste and artistic feeling. Is there not, for instance, something graceful and æsthetic in the account which he gave me of the troubles of Mr. Westervelt? What sublimity of eulogium, what tenderness of sympathy! Yet there was nothing in it, for at other times he made sport of the poor gentleman's situation, grinning at

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aristocratic carriage on the Bloomingdale road, with a common livery-stable pacer. I looked back and politely lifted my hat to him in apology; but the old gentleman's bile was stirred, and he totally refused to recognize me; indeed, he had had the insolence to cut me once or twice before. Since that time the breach has been past healing;—I never call on him in New York, and he never comes to Seacliff. As for his granddaughters, they make him one stiff visit annually, when he lectures them furiously on economy, and sends them off with two hundred and fifty dollars a-piece to buy new dresses. I don't think he exactly hates them, but he doesn't care to be troubled with them. The fact is, they are women; and Westervelt, junior, he says, is another woman; and women, in his opinion, are bores; an opinion, Mr. Fitz Hugh, with which I am sometimes tempted to coincide. I have had a great deal of trouble with the fair sex in my time. You have no idea how frantic the city girls are after us North America fellows."

While Hunter poured forth his little stream of information, foaming, so to speak, with conceited grimaces and gestures, I subsided rapidly into a low condition of spirits. Miss Westervelt, then, was grandchild of Westervelt, senior, of South Street; was heiress, more or less apparent, to a considerable share in an estate of four or five millions; was, in short, so throned on golden expectations as to be entirely out of reach to an undistinguished, semi-indigent person like myself. To conceal my distress I remarked gayly, "He must be a tremendous character, this Westervelt, senior. Whenever I pass through South Street again, I shall try to peep into his den and get a view of the old tiger."

"Somerville goes to New York to-day," said Hunter. "Somerville would be delighted to present you to him; or perhaps I had better give you a letter of introduction; in fact I will do so, I insist upon it."

He had forgotten what he had told me five minutes before about the cessation of intercourse between himself and Westervelt, senior. He often lost track of his own stories thus,

this short-sighted Hunter. The real state of the case was, as I learned long afterwards, that he had never been acquainted at all with Westervelt, senior, who would have nothing to do with the Van Leers or their kindred.

"Is Somerville off?" I asked eagerly. "Why—how—what sends him away?"

"Mr. Fitz Hugh, I beg your confidence," said he, with an impressive wave of that significant right hand, and a circular glance of caution which swept the horizon. "You are a man of the world, like myself; a word to the wise is sufficient: secrecy!! My friend Mr. Somerville, for whom I have the highest, the profoundest respect and admiration, is a man of fascinating manners, accomplishments, and social powers, who has the misfortune to be irresistibly attractive to women, and is therefore the terror of suspicious husbands and fathers. My friend Mr. Westervelt indulges in the one solitary weakness of dreading his influence. Westervelt, senior, hates him; has forbidden his own house to him; has requested that he shall not be invited to Seaclyff. [And yet Somerville was to present me to this Westervelt, senior.] You may well suppose that the knowledge of these facts grates on the susceptibility of a man so delicate and courteous in soul as Somerville. He sees that the politeness of the master of the house is constrained, that there is no heart in it; and he leaves. For my part, if I were Mr. Westervelt, I would scorn these miserable doubts and suspicions. They are a reflection, as unnecessary as undeserved, on his wife and daughters, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

You poor fool! I thought. Can't you see that he is simply looking to the safety of your own feather-brained sister?

I had learned a great deal from Mr. Hunter, though, to be sure, I could not exactly decide what was wheat in his narrative, and what was chaff, inasmuch as he invariably related the true and the false with the same fluency, the same picturesqueness of circumstance, the same animation of voice and gesture. He was the most unfathomable liar that I ever

saw, for the reason, perhaps, that in the moment of invention he actually believed what he said, or, at least, felt a sensation delusively similar to belief. His very heart went out in his fibs, and experienced an emotion of pride and gratitude when they were well received.

I resolved to walk up to Seacliff and see for myself whether Somerville was really about to leave. For once, possibly in a fit of absence of mind, Hunter had told the truth; our elegant friend, dressed in travelling attire of English plaid, was suavely, smilingly, but with a mild melancholy in his Grecian countenance, bidding farewell to the ladies. Mrs. Van Leer expressed her regret at his departure with a brazen liberty of speech which amazed and disgusted me. Mr. and Mrs. Westervelt were embarrassed, and at a loss for remarks, wandering up and down with that look which people have when they feel themselves at liberty to say anything but what they feel. Mary was reserved; Genevieve silent also, but sullen; the Van Leer men as inexpressive as usual.

A sudden fancy seized me to go to New York with Somerville and learn something positive concerning his habits and character. When I proposed to be his companion down, he welcomed the offer with a warmth of manner, which, in itself, without a single compliment, conveyed the impression that he was not only delighted, but surprised and positively grateful, as if I had accorded to him some especial favor and honor. It is so easy for an elegant veteran of the world to flatter a young fellow, without even taking the trouble to lie!

In those my migratory days I always kept a carpet-bag ready packed for short trips, and thus I was able to present myself fully equipped in five minutes. Robert Van Leer drove us in the double carriage of the family to the Rockford station. Robert was in good spirits, which, indeed, was commonly the case with him when he had eaten well and the weather was fine, for he had strong sympathies with the physical creation.

"I say, Fitz Hugh, old feller, come back in a hurry now," he roared at me over his shoulder. "Don't you stay more 'n a couple of days now. We shall miss you like thunder. Genevieve 'll miss you particular, haw haw haw. I say, Somerville, I've got a plan for Fitz Hugh; he's got to marry Genevieve the very day I marry Mary. An't that a good idea, eh?"

"Too young, Robert," said I, coolly, although disturbed. "A girl of seventeen isn't old enough to be married."

"Genevieve an't old enough!" exclaimed Bob, contemptuously. "An't she, though! An't she, Somerville? What was that you said the other day about women being like potatoes?"

"Don't recollect. You are thinking of Hunter, perhaps," observed Somerville.

"No, I an't thinking of Hunter; it was you," insisted Bob. "You said women were like potatoes;—old enough when they were big enough."

The coarse blockhead roared with delight over the comparison, never suspecting that it was an absolute insult to Genevieve. All the way to Rockford he continued to babble about the two marriages; but interesting as the subject was to me, I did not find his remarks worth remembering.

The New Haven train soon screamed down upon us, and halted with the usual snorting and shuffling to receive passengers.

"Good bye! good luck, old boys!" shouted Robert; and, tumbling into the baggage-car, we were off.

Let us rejoice that there exists in this world, not everywhere indeed, but in some extra-civilized countries, that free-and-easy institution, that ambulatory club-room, the smoking-car. There you can enjoy one of the greatest and cheapest of luxuries; there, too, you can get rid of those disagreeable people who don't smoke. But in this wonderful land of ours, the brag of all creation, such a thing as a smoking-car is nearly unknown; and in consequence a trav-

eller whose time weighs heavy on his brain, and who is dying for his customary Havana, must generally resort to the baggage-car: a gloomy, contracted pen, almost windowless, where he has nothing to sit on but a hat-box, and where he is sure to be smashed flat in case of a collision: a pen, too, which an inhospitable placard forbids to him, and from which he is liable to be excommunicated by the conductor, on suspicion that he is a mail-robber or a trunk-picker. Somerville and I were both smoking, and hence the baggage-car. Seating ourselves on a sailor's grimy sea-chest, Somerville talked of Paris, Florence, Greece, and Constantinople, while I meditated my objects in leaving Seacliff. In the first place I meant to stick close to my friend and inveigle his secrets from him by artful conversation; to track his doubles in New York, ascertain his haunts, and take note of his companions; in short, to learn his character and his possibilities for evil. In the second place, I proposed to make the acquaintance of Westervelt, senior, by whatever unforeseen means might present itself; with some dim, vague, unlikely, stupid intention of giving him a hint concerning the mystery of Seacliff; with some hope also, that I should engage him in the task of barring the demon from my paradise.

Accident favored me at first, and I made a suspicious discovery. Drawing out his handkerchief suddenly to intercept a sneeze, Somerville jerked from his breast pocket a little chinking package. As it fell against my pantaloons, slipped down between my feet and unfolded there, I naturally picked it up for him, and could not avoid seeing that it was a lady's watch, costly in make and furnished with a heavy chain, at the end of which dangled some jewelled trinkets.

"Doubly obliged," said he, coolly wrapping up the expensive trifle in the scrap of newspaper from which it had dislodged, and restoring it to his pocket. "I think your pants saved it from smashing. I should have been annoyed to see it injured. It was handed to me to get it cleaned."

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bad as the wicked would have us believe. The respectable classes may be none too worthy of the name, but they are far more worthy than the disreputable classes represent them. The corrupt are engaged in an eternal conspiracy against the good fame of the decent. For instance, a rumor comes out that some lady in a fashionable or religious circle has fallen from virtue. The tale is instantly welcomed by all the rakes and harlots in town; they rejoice in it, plead for it, magnify it, proclaim it; they fairly wallow in it like hogs in the mire. For my part, I can easier credit that a gay Lothario will lie, or that circumstances will deceive, than that a woman, who has been educated purely, will commit that folly which in her is the crime of crimes, the sin inexpiable, the misstep from which there is no recovery. I think that such would be the creed of every true gentleman."

Oh, the interesting villain! I thought; the sentiments are just and magnanimous; but what does he mean by counterfeiting them? Has he mistrusted my suspicions of him, and does he intend to shame me out of them with the fear of being considered one of the vulgar and disreputable? I must be cautious, or I shall put myself in a false position.

He threw away his cigar now, and seemed to be awaiting my pleasure to leave the baggage chaos. Determined to be polite and insinuating, at no matter what cost of the means of happiness, I tossed out of the window a delicate cheroot only half smoked, bowed him through the door, and followed him into the passenger cars. Disappointment and derision pursued my novitiate in detective-policeman-ship. As we sidled through the second car, looking for a vacant place in the long rows of crimson velvet cushions, a fan touched Somerville on the arm, and a genteel pretty lady of twenty-two or twenty-three, who seemed to be travelling alone, blushing-ly pronounced his name. With a gesture of apology for quitting me, he halted, and took the single unoccupied seat by her side. Another Mrs. Van Leer, perhaps, I thought, as I

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heavens. Deformities of soul, hideous hunchbacks of spirit would present themselves in unimaginable varieties of hatefulness. The monsters that spawn in the sunless caverns of the sea, the unnamed creatures that inhabited the first ages of creation, the ghostly, formless shapes of Chaos and Old Night, the chimeras, hydras, sphinxes, griffins, and centaurs of antique credence, would not be so abnormal to my sight as would be these incorporeal fellow-beings of mine, could I behold them. How many a man, with the spirit of a murderer, goes through life innocent of blood! How many another, who longs to commit foul outrage upon innocence, and who does not slay his passions but secretly feeds them with vicious reveries, is always held by the chains of fear or of circumstance within the limits of external virtue! Such, at least, is the orthodox theological view of these moral dissimilarities. If the transcendentalists and optimists are right, they are not monstrous, but normal, and the mere "stepping-stones to better things." It is a gentle belief, certainly, and very attractive in its catholic charity.

Apropos of these reflections, I tried to fancy the spiritual man of Somerville, walking beside his physical man, and contrasting hideously with its graceful and dignified beauty. Would it so contrast, or was I doing him injustice? That was exactly the question which I intended to solve. In the mean time neither his spiritual nor his physical man appeared to me.

Turning into South Street, I looked for No. 800, resolved to know Westervelt, senior, at least by sight, and perhaps hoping, in my silly heart, that I should fall into accidental conversation with him, and win his instant favor. Would it not have been a beautiful thing to charm his stony nature, to coax him to offer me his granddaughter, and to be the means of reconciling him with the family of Seacliff? There was the Quincy granite portal of the money god's temple, and there was that name which represented so many dollars, painted unostentatiously on a small tin placard, scratched

and grimy, which was fastened to one of the plain gray doorposts. I think that I felt somewhat as Christian did when he passed the cave of Giant Pope in the shadowy valley. This is the den of an ancient catiff, I said, who could do me fearful harm, dungeon my life in despair, break my heart on the wheel, crack all my sinews of hope, and surround my feelings with consuming fagots of disappointment. Then I nearly laughed to think of the angry astonishment of the old gentleman, if I should walk in some day and address him as Grandfather!

While I loitered, a small, thin, alert man of seventy or seventy-five, with large Roman features, great gray eyes, and short stiff white hair, brushed upright, stepped briskly into the doorway from the interior, and stared sternly at the Quincy granite stores opposite, very much as if he had resolved to knock them down that afternoon, and build better ones next morning. He talked impatiently to himself, and beat a sharp tattoo with his cane on the granite doorstone. As I resumed my walk, and passed slowly by him, a tall, portly gentleman came to his side and looked down at him with precisely the same expression as if he were looking up at him. "So," said he, "you decidedly disapprove of the operation, Mr. Westervelt?"

"Yes, sir," returned the senior, in a voice as sharp, distinct, and decided as the click of his cane. "Disapprove of it altogether, sir. You don't want two more clippers any more than you want two camel-leopards. Shouldn't weight yourself, so, sir. Why, sir, my dunce of a son couldn't have a worse idea. No, sir; no more clippers. Good-morning, Mr. Jones."

Down he came from the doorstone, brushing against my shoulder, and stamping vigorously away ahead of me, without a single glance, favorable or unfavorable, for my person.

So that is her grandfather! I said to myself. He resembles her rather less than the dry root of a peach-tree resembles the golden fruit which swings among the green branches above it.

This was the whole of my acquaintance with Westervelt, senior, for some time. I walked back to Broadway, on the look-out for Somerville; but it was not easy to find such a slippery needle in such a vast haymow as New York; and at last I returned, dispirited, tired, hungry, and cross, to the St. Knickerbocker.





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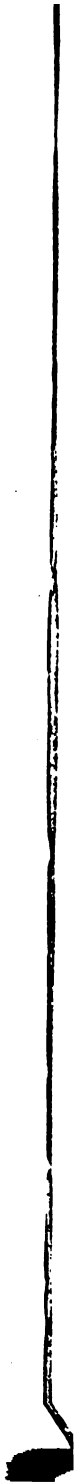
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to the *devoir* of conquering for me some island of Barataria, undiscovered as yet, in the wide ocean of fame. How simply pleased I was to hold him in my hand, and with what an affectation of indifference I spoke of his prospects! I was old enough to behave better; but a man is always youthful the moment he publishes his first book.

Humorously telling Messrs. Bookworm & Binder that I hoped they would not become bankrupt because I had idled in Italy, I bade them good-morning and walked back into Broadway, feeling as if the wings were already sprouting from my hitherto merely human shoulders. The idea occurred to me of running in upon fashionable lady friends to catechize them about the moral standing of Somerville; but would a lady, however fashionable, know the worst, or knowing it, have the face to utter it? The female American is fastidiously delicate, and ignores the existence of Don Juans and Julias, at least so far as I have had an opportunity to enjoy her conversation. It is laughable sometimes, but the practical result seems to be good, and perhaps it is the better way.

At the moment of closing this brief moral generalization, I caught a glimpse of something in the window of a third-rate jeweller's shop, which brought me to a sudden halt, followed by a prolonged stare and a thrill of discovery. Stepping in with an assumed air of indifference, I nodded politely to a green youth behind the counter, who seemed to be troubled with that ailment peculiar to chickens, known as the gapes, and asked him to let me see some ladies' watches and bracelets. He showed several middling specimens of both, but none of them were exactly what I wanted. At last I ventured to point out a diamond bracelet, and an enamelled watch with a remarkably heavy chain, which hung in the window, and signified to him that those articles might prove an irresistible attraction.

"But these are second-hand," said I, after a moment's examination.



Shocking as the supposition was, anxiously as I sought to evade it, it seemed probable that Somerville had made an utter ruin of Mrs. Van Leer, and was now robbing her purse of its pittance, and her person of its trinkets, by the hideous right that he had robbed her soul of its purity.

I suppose that I was something of a mystery, and perhaps an object of grave suspicion to the pawn-brokers and small jewellers of New York during the rest of that day. I hunted them in all directions, inspected their windows and show-cases, and made them exhibit their most secret stores, purchasing nothing meanwhile, and solely intent on spying out second-hand ornaments which bore the name of Van Leer, and had been in the possession of Somerville. It was a fruitless and perhaps foolish way of spending my time, but it was the best that I could devise. Indeed, I possess hardly a ripple of what might be called the bump of detectiveness, and should make one of the clumsiest spies or policemen that could be, as the reader will abundantly perceive by the time he has finished this history. At last it occurred to me that it would be a good thing, the very thing that I ought to have done at first, to buy the watch and bracelet which I had recognized. I will do so, said I; stick them in Somerville's face; stick them in Mrs. Van Leer's face; see if they won't turn twenty colors. I hurried back to the shop, but the watch and the bracelet had disappeared.

"Sold, sir; regular bargain; snapped up right away," said green youth, while the blush of an inexperienced liar mantled his downy countenance. They had taken the alarm there, and were on their guard against me.

Emerging from the shop, I caught sight of Somerville, as I thought, in an omnibus which was receding up Broadway. No hack-stand being near, I gave chase in another omnibus, choosing of course a full one, and suffering torments between two fat women, who all the while looked daggers at me as if I was very impertinent in occupying any space whatsoever. After a fidgeting pursuit of half a mile, my vehicle passed

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time and so keep the world waiting for its titbits of tattle, I'll walk in your direction. I am in the greatest need of a gossip-monger. Do you know anything of a merchant in the China trade, named—ah—let me see—oh, Westervelt,—yes, that's the name,—Westervelt."

"Old Westervelt? Westervelt, senior, of South Street? Know anything of him? Yes, know he's rich; worth at least five millions. Hang the unintellectual old Croesus! Why doesn't he patronize literature, and start poor authors? I'll tell you what I'd do, Fitz Hugh, if I had five millions, or even so little as a million; I'd look up talented poor rats,—fellows with full heads and empty stomachs,—support 'em while they took their time to write good things,—then help 'em publish. Why the devil these auriferous old dunces don't think of it, and do it, is more than I can understand."

"Perhaps you had best mention the idea to Mr.—Mr. Whatshisname. Perhaps he would be delighted to hear of it."

"Delighted to kick me out of his office. You can't imagine, Fitz Hugh, how basely indifferent our New York merchant princes are to literature. All they go for is hard facts; that is, facts that can be transmuted into hard money. Well, what do you want to know about old Westervelt?"

"Is it perfectly positive that he—that he is—ah, so enormously wealthy?" (Here I twisted my moustache, and looked up and down the street indifferently.) "Isn't he very much extended, and liable to break, eh?"

"Not a bit of it; no extension about him; never'll ask an extension, either. China'll break before he does. He isn't much in the central flowery trade now; investing, perhaps, in the other celestial kingdom. Yes, he cut the pig-tails about two years ago. They made a new house of it, and he only put in half a million as silent partner; so, you see, he can't lose much, especially as he never indorses, not even for his own son. I believe the balance of his estate is well distributed and well invested. Why, sir, he has a million in

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try already. Much better use it in giving twenty-five thousand apiece to forty struggling geniuses. However, that story about the college is all nonsense; you may take my word for it that old Westervelt will never let a dollar roll outside of the family circle.—But, hallo! there's my man, and yours too. See that elegant swell over there? That's Dandy Somerville. He knows New York from the foam to the dregs. Come along. I want some fashionable scandal, and you can ask him about Westervelt, senior. By the way, what makes you take such an interest in the old fellow? Got acquainted with the granddaughters?"

"Good-bye, my dear boy," said I, hastily, "I know Somerville; see him some other time; don't ask him anything for me. Much obliged for your information. Good-bye. By the way, just ask Somerville where he is staying. See you again sometime. Good-bye, old fellow."

Naturally, I did not care to let Somerville know that I was inquiring about the fortune of Westervelt, senior. He might be malicious enough to joke about the affair at Seacliff, and he certainly would not give me credit for my true feelings on the subject, nor believe that these vast specie expectations of Miss Westervelt were only a burden and terror to my spirit. At first it was bad enough, when only the miragie enchantment of beauty seemed to put her beyond my reach; but now, furthermore, I had discovered a golden desert between us, as discouraging in its dimensions as the great Zahara.

I saw the Reporter overtake Somerville, talk with him a minute, and lead him into Delmonico's.

Fashionable scandal! I muttered. A pretty way of earning your treats! Let me ever catch you setting a bad word afloat about the Westervelts, you elegant calumniator! And only yesterday, you gave me such a noble lecture on the dirtiness of scandal. Verily, Satan rebuketh sin, in these times as of old.

Looking about for an ambush from whence to waylay

Somerville on his reappearance, I observed a chop-house, directly opposite Delmonico's, bearing the following legend on its sign board.

THE RETREAT OF OLD BILL HOBSON.

Hot Joints from Twelve to Four.

I entered, and seated myself at a table by a front window. It was a long, dark room, slovenly, soiled, and smoky, containing thirteen small tables of stained cherry, thirty-three wooden-bottomed chairs, a model of a pilot schooner set over a freckled looking-glass, and two or three rusty engravings of yachts, racers, &c., hanging awry against the walls. On one of the tables lay two or three copies of the Illustrated London News, two or three Punches, a Bell's Life in London, and a New York Herald. A dozen men of the "hossy" sort, mostly English, sat here and there, eating, drinking, talking, and smoking. A handsome, dissipated young fellow stood near me, calling on a party of his friends to finish their dinner and come out on a lark. Holding fast to a chair with one hand, and gesturing violently with the other, he swayed and jerked like a galvanized corpse, talked loud, swore at every other word, looked about him insolently, as if anxious to pick a quarrel, and, in short, was very drunk and not far from delirium tremens. A chubby boy was serving the guests with fat jorums and long slinn glasses of ale. Old Bill himself, a lean leathery personage, an Englishman run to legs in America, approached me with a dignified suavity which showed travel, and asked what I would have. I told him ale, and he brought me some half-and-half, as full of sparkle as the best of London. Lighting a cheroot, I sipped quietly, keeping an eye on the door of Delmonico's, and an ear on the conversation of my neighbors.

"I tell you, I had a lark last night," said the man who was coquetting with mania-a-potu. He had seated himself by this time, finding that it was impossible to inveigle his hungry comrades away from their dinner.

sort of dirt.

“ You be hanged! I’ll be all right
But just listen, won’t you? and hold y
was out with Somerville; you know
everybody knows Somerville. But I
night; yes, curse it, till morning come a
all the hells and holes we could find
in New York that Somerville can’t find
sly one.”

“ Did he find the hole in your pocket

“ In my pocket? Well, everything
know, boys, haw haw haw! put every
morning.”

This young man did not share in t
against the word *damn*, and used it in
have hypocritically represented him a
of much milder and less sulphurous i
should give his conversation exactly a
the good world would shut to the ex
hastily as it would close, or thinks it w
hell, if permitted to do so.

He went on detailing, in his drunken
ulars of a night spent in the sewers c

gabling resort, where the Somerville of the drunken tale was largely. "And I lost," continued Tom; "he won, and I lost; that was it. I never was lucky with him. We always drink, and he never minds the liquor; just as sharp and bobbing after it as before. No, I never was lucky with him: but damn, curse it, I don't 'grudge it; no gentleman would 'grudge it. He needs the money, you know, or he couldn't keep his birds a-flying."

Half an hour having passed, I got impatient, and paying for my ale at the door, strolled over to Delmonico's, resolved to join the two scandal-mongers. Seated alone at one of the most retired of the little tables, bottles and glasses standing empty before him on the sticky marble, the Reporter was scribbling with pencil in a well worn note-book.

"Ah! there you are again," said I. "Where is Somerville?"

"Gone. Saw a gentleman at the front door looking for him, and left by the back door."

"A pretty early hour to be thirsty," I remarked, nodding at the bottles. "I reverence the strength of your head."

"Only soda-water. Somerville made a night of it somewhere, and wanted to cool his coppers instead of heating them. Flush of money, too; paid the shot out of his own pocket; most uncommon performance for him, I assure you. I think somewhat of giving his magnanimity a favorable notice in our paper. Not that he is stingy; but then he generally spends his cash on the other sex, and so has to sponge upon ours; in other words, robs Peter to pay Pauline."

"Well, you asked him where he was staying?"

"No, I didn't: it was of no use; he is off in two hours for Washington; at least, he told me so."

"He may have told you the truth," said I. "Now what's the gossip? Let's have it in advance of the public."

"Why, yes; I've got a jewel here, that is sure. The only fault is that it is too brilliant; it might attract too much

attention. I shall have to pare it a little before it will be safe to set it up as the capital of one of our columns. Look here. Do you want to see the dirty work that I have to do in order to earn my bread, at the same time that I gratify my passion for pen and ink? Thank your stars, Fitz Hugh, that your father lived before you."

I took the note-book and read a paragraph of two pages. It was a tale of sin and shame in high life; of a folly-stricken woman and a man who gloried in villainy; a story without names, but marked by dates, and events, and places; a story the more abominable because the narrator of it was evidently its hero. I read it twice over, following out its chain of circumstances carefully, and coming each time to so distinct a conclusion, that I nearly pronounced aloud, "Mrs. Van Leer!"

"Now then," said I, as he retook the note-book, "how much will you get for that rascally trifle?"

"With the help of a joke or two, and ditto of quotations from the proper authors, I think I can make a dollar-piece out of it. But that isn't all: it will get me credit at the office for cleverness; and therefore I may fairly consider it worth, say three dollars. To be sure, I shall have to give Somerville an advertisement in our paper; hook it in if possible; pay it, if necessary."

"An advertisement? Has the man really any business?"

"Yes; business in Cupid's court; he advertises in the personal column."

"Oh! He does, eh? What signature? come now, that's a good fellow."

"No, I ain't a good fellow, and I shan't tell you the signature. You wouldn't have me frighten away the goose that lays my goldenest eggs, would you?"

"No; never mind; it was mere curiosity. But I covet this story of yours, and I'll give you five dollars for it."

"You? What do you want of it? Are you going to set

up a daily, and have a scandal department? Please to nominate me one of your editors; not in the tittle-tattle line, though; I crave respectability."

"Never mind what I want of it. I want to burn it more than anything else. What do you say to the offer?"

"You are the most persuasive creature, Fitz Hugh! You have such an insinuating way with poor geniuses! I'll take the shekels, and there's your copyright."

He tore out the two sheets, and I put them in my pocket, while he calmly fobbed the half eagle.

"Of course the story is altogether mine now," said I; "you are not to print it nor repeat it. And, by the way, suppose that you tell me one thing: don't you believe that Somerville himself is the rascally hero of this narrative?"

"Why, he didn't say that, you understand. Of course you are at liberty to suspect it; but he didn't confess it."

"No matter. I believe that he is, whether his boast of success is true or false. I only wish that the manuscript were in his handwriting."

"Ah! but in that case you wouldn't have got it. Honor among thieves, you know, even if they filch good names. By the way, you seem to know, or to guess at, the lady's personality."

"Possibly. What would you give to learn it? I would part with the secret for a million—nothing less."

"How very cheap! But I don't happen to have such a thing as a million about me. I wish I had. Another time, if you please, unless you are willing to take my note, payable when I have secured all my castles in the clouds. For I do dream of millions, Fitz Hugh; yes, I have faith to believe that there is a million somewhere laid up for me; at least in the coin of fame. But I must be off to hunt down some other reputation for my villainous public. Your humble servant."

"Good-bye, my dear fellow. Forgive me for just one frank word at parting. I don't like this particular rut, or

Press that I work for, I acknowledge ; but less afraid of the devil than of my own situation with me is not so much how I can do of the one, as how I can pacify the juices all very easy for you to preach and pr with your pockets full of half eagles and stock. But put yourself in my situation dending coming in from year's end to year while an old mother looking to you to stand under her teapot. You haven't lived a human life, my boy."

We both colored ; he, with shame and the shame of my reproof.

"I beg your pardon, my friend," said the port a mother? I never earned a dollar port, not even my own. You humble very sorry that I have annoyed you with

"Don't take it hard," he replied, good are right at bottom ; good ends don't justify holy Jesuit fathers to the contrary, I crawl out of this puddle, as you very long. Good-bye, again."

We shook hands and he walked away

and exemplar of society, could be the deliberate oppressor, torturer, and robber, of an unfortunate woman, whose too great confidence and love had placed her in his power? Would any man dare to hint such infamies concerning his own life? No, the story could not be true, or it must refer to some other than Somerville. And yet—the words of the boudoir! And yet—the bracelet! the watch! I vacillated, believed, disbelieved, suspected, and remained at last in a state of the most disagreeable doubt.





CHAPTER XI.

APPROACHING THE MYSTERY.

I WAS about to return to Seacliff that afternoon, when business thrust its iron finger into my button-hole. Day after day necessity said, Remain! and in great vexation of spirit I obeyed, finding only this comfort in my calamity, that I could send to that country-house which was my public, a copy of the "Idler in Italy," on the fly-leaf of which was written, "To Miss Mary Westervelt, with the compliments of Louis Fitz Hugh."

Resolved not to abate one atom of my privileges as an author, I forwarded an accompanying note, wherein I introduced my trifling sketches of travel to Miss Westervelt, begged her to excuse the liberty which I took in bringing them to her notice, regretted that they were not more worthy of her attention, and informed her, although with some misgivings as to the propriety of personal particulars, that I hoped soon to regain the delightful society of Seacliff. How I felt as I dropped the billet into the post-office, and saw that it was gone beyond recall! It seemed as if I had taken a decisive step in life; as if I had passed bodily through that narrow orifice; as if I could no more be the Fitz Hugh that I had been.

For an answer to this note and its printed fellow ambassador, I haunted the post-office till all the clerks knew me by sight, and used to look through their files without stopping to hear my name. There are persons whose mere routine of

life it is to be ministers of fate to their fellow-creatures, and none perform this office more constantly, more unconsciously, than the quick-eyed men whose faces greet yours through those plain, matter-of-fact openings labelled DELIVERY. Nothing came for me, and life began to wear an aspect of dreariness verging upon the downright disagreeable. I suspected various annoying things: was sure that Bob Van Leer had intercepted the book; that Mr. Westervelt had indignantly kicked it into the fire; that Somerville had returned to Seacliff, and slandered me; that Miss Westervelt herself looked upon me as an impertinent; that the post-office clerks had robbed the mail. I resolved that I would not go back to Seacliff; and as soon as I could, I broke my resolution. Ten days of absence had elapsed,—ten days of two hundred and forty hours each, instead of twenty-four,—when I again came in sight of the low, rounded bluff, its crest of trees, and its imitation Parthenon.

“Well, Lewy, and now I suppose you are going up to the great house right away,” said Ma Treat, smiling very cunningly and cheerfully.

“I rather think not this evening,” drawled I, indifferently; and was hesitating up the Seacliff steps, within an hour thereafter. Through the wide-open door breathed the old, well-remembered rustle of womanly robes, and, borne on it, giving forth no other sound of motion, came Miss Westervelt, flushed, smiling, with an outstretched hand of welcome.

“Mr. Fitz Hugh!” she exclaimed, “I am glad to see you back again. Very, very much obliged to you for your book, and for your letter also.”

“Ah! you received them, then?” I replied solemnly. “I was not aware—”

“Yes, indeed. And I would have sent my thanks to you, but you did not mention your address. You spoke, too, as if you were not to be in New York long.”

“Ah—yes, yes—certainly, I remember. How very absurd in me! I must apologize to you,—or rather I must

apologize to myself, for my blunder ; it has deprived me of a great favor."

Following her into the parlor, I found the whole family, excepting Mr. Westervelt, who had, of course, gone to New York on business. They welcomed me heartily, abused me for having stayed away so long, and gave me such a handshaking as half made me think myself the president of some country. My fingers were the most severely treated by my sincere friend and bore, Robert Van Leer, who did not in the least understand my smile of disgust, but showed such delight at seeing me that it seemed as if he would not be contented unless he could hold me in lap. Before I had been in the room ten minutes, I felt as distinguished men, perhaps, feel, when they first become aware of their celebrity ; for my friends were charmed with my book, all of them, down to Robert, who only regretted there were no pictures. Miss Westervelt, as I discovered to her confusion, had read it privately to herself, and then read it aloud to her father, without receiving from him the mildest provocation thereto, by request or indirectly. Mrs. Van Leer was uncommonly gracious, and bestowed upon me some of those attentions with which she had been accustomed to inveigle Somerville.

"I tell you, old feller, you're a brick," said Bob, drawing me aside at the first opportunity. "I knew you had the brains,—knew it the first time I heard you speak. I say, why *don't* you go in for Genevieve ? You could get her easy now that you've got to be somebody. Ain't she growing up a beauty, though ? Why, sometimes I think she's pretty near as handsome as her sister. She'll have lots of tin, too, some of these days ; and while that's a-coming along, you could be writing these books of yours. By Jove ! wouldn't it be fun if we should all four get married together, hey ?"

"How do you get on with your own suit ?" I inquired, artfully.

"Well, the old man's agreeable, of course ; but Mary, she kind of turns me off and keeps me outside of the fence ; plays

me, you know, like a feller does a fish. Hang it! some fellers that's got the grit and the brains would go right in and win; but I can't: when she sidles away from me so, and looks grave, I feel all shut up, and can't say a word for myself. Hang it! I wish I could write;—I'd write it all out to her in poetry; that would bring her to, wouldn't it? But I'm glad you sent her that book of yours. She was mighty pleased to get it, and thanked me for bringing it to her from the post-office. Old feller, I'm thunderingly obliged to you, I am so."

Here he shook my hand again, and suffered me to slip back into the parlor.

"Do you know, Mr. Fitz Hugh," said Mrs. Van Leer with a killing smile, "that I am made hor—ribly jealous by that breast-pocket of yours? It looks precisely as if there might be a min—iature in it; and I know that it is not mine. Do tell us whose it is."

I cannot help laughing now to think how anxious I was to clear myself of the charge contained in this raillery. I hastily drew forth a tumbled copy of the New York Tattler, my friend's paper, and then slapped my pocket to show that it was empty.

"Oh, that is all!" said the gay lady. "I feel relieved. Come, Mr. Fitz Hugh, read us the deaths and marriages."

A little disconcerted by her coquettish pretences to me, I fumbled over the paper, searching for an item which should divert her badinage from me to some other object. I found more than I looked for; something which, I thought, referred to her; something which, it seemed to me, would crush her. I debated tremulously with myself whether I should read this paragraph aloud. Let justice have her right, I decided; let the guilty one be called on to come out from among the innocent; let her be commanded to brand herself publicly with the blush of her own shame. Without any preamble or explanation, therefore, I read from the column headed *Personal*, this advertisement, "JOSEPHINE, you treat me ill; you do

not answer me. I shall reappear. Love me or kill me.
RUDOLPH."

From "Rudolph," I raised my eyes instantly to Mrs. Van Leer, and was fairly confounded by the serene, dazzling brass of that canty countenance. First came a stare of pure naive astonishment, then a sudden sparkle of coquettish comprehension, then a quick glance of roguery from me to Miss Westervelt, and then a laugh, long, silvery, jocund, and malicious.

"Ha! ha! ha! I see," she said. "*Je commence a comprendre.* I heard that some—body wrote, and got no answer to his letter;—sent a book, and received no thanks for it. And so at last he fell to adverti—sing, did he? Really, Mary, you look uncom—monly innocent; or, rather, you try to."

While I gasped for words under this impudence, which seemed to hit me like a slap in the face, Miss Westervelt replied for me, with that readiness of speech which women have, but not without a heightening of color. "For shame, Julia! How uncharitable you are to charge Mr. Fitz Hugh with such nonsense!"

"Yes, indeed! I protest against it," said I, with unnecessary vehemence of language and manner. "I object altogether to such an idea. I assure you that I—"

"I ask your par—don, Mr. Fitz Hugh," put in the criminal, with a mock humility of look, which was meant to be excessively humorous. "Of course it was a naughty insinuation, and of course there wasn't an atom of truth in it."

At that moment I heard a familiar footstep on the floor of the veranda, and saw a well-known handsome face peep smiling through one of the front windows. Here is Rudolph, I thought; but I only said, "Here is Somerville."

Mrs. Van Leer started up gleefully, ran to the front of the parlor, peered out into the evening dusk, tapped on the glass, and then sailed into the hall, holding up her skirts so as to expose a pretty foot and rounded ankle. Miss Westervelt

turned her face that way without rising, and I thought that she looked disconcerted and anxious. It struck me that she knew of the venomous mystery which lay coiled like a snake in the bosom of the family, and that consequently she must have understood the promise of the advertisement, and saw now in Somerville's arrival its fulfilment. The mingled embarrassment and hauteur, with which she received his complimentary salutations, confirmed me in this suspicion. Genevieve, too, was stiff and reserved, although her fine eyes were full of an excitement which I could not understand.

"Where is Mrs. Westervelt?" he asked, as he installed himself on the sofa beside Mary; and I then recollected, vaguely, that she had left the room while I was reading the advertisement.

"I don't know. She will be in presently, I dare say," observed Genevieve, dryly.

"I supposed that she could not be away," he said. "I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Westervelt this morning, and he told me that I should find her here."

Genevieve went out, and soon returned with a message from her stepmother, begging Mr. Somerville to excuse her absence from the parlor, as she had just gone to bed with a headache.

"Certainly," he replied. "No apology was necessary. Please to inform her how much I regret her indisposition."

Really, my dear fellow, you are a cool one, thought I. Can't you see that nobody in the house wants you except Mrs. Van Leer, who is herself but a guest, and has no right to offer the Seaclyff hospitalities? Whether he saw it or not, it evidently did not weigh on his mind, and he talked time away as gayly as any one. Mrs. Van Leer's impudence kept me in perpetual amazement, so flauntingly did she exhibit her preference for Somerville, notwithstanding that her husband sat by, and turned his slow brown eyes upon her at every one of her coquettish sallies. I watched his face carefully, without being able to detect in its broad peaceful disk

one shadow of suspicion, or any sentiment but admiration of his wife's cleverness. But the fast lady's brass shone with the most astonishing effulgence when she snatched up that copy of the Tattler, and in a voice shaken only by laughter, read to Somerville the mysterious advertisement. Were they both perfectly innocent, or were they altogether seared by sin, that they could wear faces so devoid of guilty consciousness? I turned away from them, for they seemed to dazzle me, as two flaming devils might have done.

But for such thorny thoughts as these, the evening would have passed like a dream of unmingled roses. Somerville remained attached to Mrs. Van Leer's skirts, which literally fluttered and wriggled with coquettish delight, making occasionally a most liberal display of French bootees and snow-white stockings. Genevieve seemed absent, dull, and only changed a few commonplace remarks with Henry Van Leer. Consequently, I had Miss Westervelt to myself; for although Bob sat by us, he was unobtrusive and silent, like a good-natured, speechless, unsuspecting dolt, as he was; an attentive listener to our talk, indeed, but a most unalarmed and gratified one; his broad eyes fixed steadily on her, and never diverted to me by any thrill of jealousy. Were there ever two other brothers in one moderate-sized parlor so befooled under their own noses as was this blockish couple of Van Leers? I got home so late that evening that Pa and Ma Treat both assaulted me with divers knowing, kindly smirks, previous to lighting me up stairs, pointing out how all my things had been nicely folded away, and leaving me with a simple good-night, which sounded like a parental benediction.

Next day brought me trumpetings heralding the entrance of the "Idler in Italy" into the world's tourney. As it was summer, the dull season in politics, business, and most other serious pursuits, the papers had little to talk about, so that my book received a flattering number of notices. To my astonishment, however, no mention was made of the slips of poetry which I had planted in my vegetable garden of prose.

I considered this a deliberate, studied disparagement, and suspected secret enemies in the New York press. I wonder how many other young authors have been haunted by the same dark suspicion, when they have seen the fairest, best-loved children of their brain, the very Josephs of their inner life, impaled on some critic's pen, or, worse still, passed by in silence. I looked to see if the lyrics had been copied into any of the papers; but the same malicious conspirators had taken steps to prevent that also; and so I confounded the age for a wooden one, not worthy the veneering of my poesy. But if the Press, that great engine of intellect and civilization, as it modestly delights to style itself, did not admire my verses, there was somebody who did, and whose good opinion I coveted more even than the favor of monthly or daily. That very day I surprised Miss Westervelt in the act of copying from a fresh printed volume into an album. On my appearance the "new publication" went into a writing-desk with great celerity, while the album was slipped under a pile of that mysterious woman's work, the ruffles and embroideries of which no bachelor dares to touch lightly. Presently, I saw Mrs. Van Leer abstract it from its hiding-place, and secrete it within the folds of her morning muslin; and two minutes after, when Miss Westervelt ran to a window to look at a humming-bird, the album was dexterously jerked into my lap, and a mischievous smile encouraged me to open it. The temptation was mighty, and I yielded to it in a hurry, after the fashion of youth. There were extracts from Dante and Tasso, Goethe and Schiller, Milton and Wordsworth, Bryant and Longfellow, in that dear, delightful, scrawly handwriting, a single pot-hook of which seemed to me enough to hang a life upon. There, too, among the deathless offspring of the gods of song, were the lyrics of the "Idler in Italy," every halt and lame mortal of them; my "Alpine Landscapes," the whole cold and rugged series, perfect boulders of unshapely versification; my "Ode to Trajan's Pillar," my "Mater Dolorosa," and my "Youthful Raphael." I

bestowed a glance of unutterable gratitude on Mrs. Van Leer, and proceeded to read all the pieces at once in great trepidation. Very soon Miss Westervelt came back to the table; halted, paralyzed, on catching sight of the volume in my hands; then made a sudden rustling charge upon me, and snatched it away.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh! that is my book!" she said, amazed apparently, and confused certainly.

I made up a face of woful penitence, and pointed at Mrs. Van Leer, who burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, and shook her white fist at me with mock indignation.

"Oh, you aw—ful coward! you mean-spirited creature!" said she. "What! I do you a fa—vor,—give you a nice sugar com—pliment to eat,—and then you expose me! Well, well; this is the last time that I trouble myself to please a man."

"Cousin Jule, you are too bad," remonstrated Mary. "You have no right to play such sharp tricks on me. You make me ridiculous."

She was quite flushed, and looked so sincerely annoyed and mortified, that my feigned air of repentance changed rapidly to a real one. Mrs. Van Leer offered no regrets, laughed repeatedly, insisted that the joke was a capital one, not to be forgotten easily, and told Somerville of it when he entered. "Don't you wish *you* were an author?" she continued. "Wouldn't it be deli—cious to surprise young ladies copying one's own po—etry? Oh! if I was a man, I would write verses, if it cost me my life."

"I congratulate Mr. Fitz Hugh," said Somerville, with that air of seemingly earnest respect which was his most winning manner. "A man who has the true lyric fire burning in his brain, is greatly to be envied. Poetry is its own exceeding reward. A poet has no right to complain, even if he remains till death, poor and unnoticed. Nature is kinder to him than to most men; she pays him in advance. The mere thrill of

conception is a sufficient recompense for the labor of expression, the lack of just appreciation, and the whole wearisomeness of life."

"Why, Mr. Somerville, you must be yourself a poet," said I, surprised into addressing him with a friendly fervor.

"You a poet, Mr. Somerville!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Leer. "Oh! are you? Why haven't you read me some of your verses? Why haven't you written me a sonnet? Come, you naughty man, defend yourself, explain! Tell me now, do you really write verses?"

"I can't believe it, Mrs. Van Leer," he replied. "Would I have failed to put you in the poet's corner—of the newspaper? Would I have failed to beg your admiration, if I had anything whereby to claim it? No, the poetic feet have never been vouchsafed me, and I have had to hobble my way through life on the crutches of prose."

"Poor man! your situation worries me," said Mrs. Van Leer. "You shouldn't exhibit so much mortification, though. It is no compliment to me, who can't write a line either."

Somerville smiled and bowed in the most flattering acknowledgment of the lady's wit.

"Some of us are fortunate enough to live poetry, Mrs. Van Leer," said he.

"Oh! thank you," she answered, courtesying. "That is for me, and I accept it. I am poetry incarnate. You can go on now with your philosophy."

"There is an enviable magic in the name of author," he continued. "It is a species of notoriety that has a more sudden expansion than most others, and perhaps a wider range. A popular writer always passes in society at his full value, and generally at something above his value. The fame of having written a book, acts upon a man somewhat as the die of the mint does on a piece of metal. Take a plain circlet of gold, equal in size and weight to an eagle, and you cannot put it in circulation; no one will receive it at its

true value until he has weighed it and tested it; and few wish to give themselves so much trouble. But let the magic finger of the mint be laid on the circlet; then every one recognizes it, and is anxious to possess it. It is just so with a man: authorship can hardly be said to increase his intrinsic value; but it certainly does increase his currency. Mr. Fitz Hugh, I congratulate you on your prospect of an extensive circulation."

What he said clearly tended to diminish my glory in the eyes of the ladies; yet his reasoning was too evidently just to admit of controversy; and, besides, opposition would have proved me guilty of absurd vanity.

"That is all perfectly just," I remarked. "Authorship is of course not an integral part of intellect; it is only one of the most popular expressions of intellect."

"Let me tell you one thing more," he said, "You will find other men's works attributed to you. You have only to wink, and the public will crown you with a chaplet of anonymous volumes. That," he added with a smile which had some scarcely perceptible curl of irony, "is another advantage of authors, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

He was wonderfully clever certainly, and had a rare grace of language and utterance. The reflection, that what he had just been saying off-hand was quite as good as anything of the kind which I could write at my serenest leisure, forced itself on me and produced a sentiment of proper humility. It was rare that he talked thus weightily before women; in general, he treated them only to the dessert, the whipped creams, of conversation; but I imagine that just now he was determined to make himself respected. Mrs. Van Leer felt the influence as well as I, and listened to his deep earnest utterance with an admiration which came as near to seriousness as her trivial character could easily feel.

"Mr. Somerville," said Mary, "the die of the mint is not all that is necessary. The circlet itself must be gold. If it is only brass, it cannot pass long for an eagle."

"Granted, Miss Westervelt. Mr. Fitz Hugh thanks you, of course, for the inferred compliment. Observe, I don't dispute its justice. I have already prophesied his currency."

So he had, and yet under his smiling mask of compliment I thought I could detect a quiet sneer of irony and detraction. Laugh who will at the sensitive vanity and the jealousy of authors, I maintain that the genus dandy and woman-killer ought to be painted with a still more enormous peacock-tail of conceit. Perhaps, however, I did injustice to Somerville; he may not have had the least fear of being blighted by the moderate shade of my bays; and, if really jealous of me, he was certainly admirable for the grace with which he complimented me.

On the evening of that day, the four ladies of the family, gallanted by Hunter and Bob Van Leer, drove over to Rockford to attend a wedding. Henry had been invited, but preferred to stay at home with a fictitious headache and a real cigar; while Somerville and I, being strangers to the happy couple, had not received the compliment of cards; and the occasion was one of such tremendous privacy that there was no possibility of smuggling us into the party. Mrs. Van Leer charged us to keep each other company; but we soon separated, as naturally as oil and water. Of late I felt an aversion for him which I blunderingly called instinctive, and considered it a proof of my quick perception of character, not remembering how much I had admired him at first, and how doubtfully I had faltered back from my primal estimate of his worth. He was fixed now, however; he had grown to be what the Italians call by their favorite word, *antivatico*; the moment I was alone with him, conversation flagged, and I seized the first chance to get away.

Leaving Somerville and Van Leer over cards and brandy, I went home and stayed in my room till I got tired to death of it. Then I turned out and strolled around the Seaclyff house; surveyed in detail its classic ugliness, now ethereal-

formed the brink of the precipice, and
feasted my eyes on the still, star-spangled
The air was summer soft, and I re-
tranquillized by the gentle magic of c

A rumble of approaching carriage
cheery voices, and, presently after, the
windows of the house, informed me
returned. It was too late to call, and
my reveries, while a change swept over
The new moon stooped lower, and fell
horizon. The clouds, which she had clothed
like the robes of the just, lost their fair
appeared in blackness, as if, like Lucifer
had fallen from heaven. A sob of win-
chiller breath flowed against my temple,
washed faster over the stones below my
sensible that a tempest was beginning
sounding pinions. Through this gloom
monitory tremor of nature, I heard a voice
wicked words. It came from the low
was distinctly audible, although the speaker
me, and his enunciation was but a hoarse
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I called up the image of Genevieve to plead to the question of, Guilty, or not guilty? I thought that I could see, now, in her strange alternations of girlish pettishness and womanly blandishment, a feverish sensibility to the influence of Somerville which resembled the disquietude of love. But had he won the cruel right to say to her, "I know that you are a guilty woman?" Her clear smooth brow, frank and fearless eye, spirited lip, and virginal pride of carriage, answered back in fine scorn of the degrading supposition, "Not guilty!" Besides, she was Mary's sister; the sharer of Mary's blood, being, daily life; and that alone sufficed to strike accusation dumb.

Was it Mrs. Westervelt? What faintest shadow of reason had I for thinking it probable?

But might not the threatened one have been a servant-girl? No, it was not at all likely: men of the world do not talk thus to waiting-maids, and Somerville would have been the last to waste rhetoric on one: he would have shaken her, throttled her, struck her, sooner than that. So I said, at least, for I was furious against him now, and believed him capable of unmanliness and brutality.

I was unable to solve my hateful enigma. The sphinx sat immovable, cruel, before me, perpetually repeating his riddle, and I could not guess it.

Meantime the storm was flapping its oceanic wings over earth and sea, like a mighty demon in his agonies. The rain spit with eldritch rage against the panes of the old house, rushed in heavy patterings athwart the slope of the roof, gulched and guttered from the broken eaves, and beat like a flail upon the long grass in front of the doorway. The wind clattered the window-frames, roared in the chimneys, and shook until they groaned the branches of the great overshadowing maple. Thunder-peals opened growling in the southwest, advanced booming, clanging along the line of shore, and fulminated overhead in prolonged, renewing crashes, which seemed as if they would crack the air and

SEACLIFF.

the universal life of nature. Monstrous javelins of struck the dusk bosom of the Sound, appearing to fire assume it utterly, so blank of being was the darkness succeeded. In general, a thunderstorm has a charm, but that one was painful and horrible.





CHAPTER XII.

A CHANGE IN THE MYSTERY.

AS I entered the Seacliff grounds early on the following day, I said to myself that I was reassured; that I believed nothing of what I had seen and heard, nothing of what I had suspected; and that in future nothing should make me believe. I went, as it were, through all the darkened chambers of my spirit one after another, and sought bravely, though more than half in vain, to light them up once more with something like hope and happiness. It was an endless, disappointing task; it was like letting candles down into foul, mephitic caverns; there was a momentary glow, and then darkness.

Mrs. Westervelt was in the garden alone, pacing pensively up and down, as men often do and women rarely. Knowing how fond she was of company and small-talk, I thought that her present demeanor betokened earnest reflection, and that perhaps she had more serious power in her than I had ever supposed. Possibly, she is brooding over the mystery, I thought, as I approached and begged leave to join her.

There is something in the position and movement of persons in a promenade which permits them to talk more unrestrainedly, and so more sincerely, than when they are sitting or standing face to face. The play of the features cannot be so easily watched, and the quiet exercise aids the action of the brain.

"You are very much to be envied, Mrs Westervelt," I said, intending to charge circuitously upon the mystery.

"Why so?" she asked, with a start which seemed almost like a contradiction of my assertion.

"Because you are so independent of the world for your means of happiness. Because you have such a charming little world of your own, all wrapped up in green leaves and roses, and peopled by certain forms that look,—to a stranger, at least,—like angels."

Mrs. Westervelt nodded and smiled good-humoredly; perhaps accepting a trifle of the angelic similitude for herself.

"Yes, the girls are very beautiful," she replied. "Mrs. Van Leer, too, is pretty—don't you think she is—at times? Well, perhaps not remarkably; but Mary and Jenny,—there is no doubt about them,—they are sweetly beautiful. I do wish that they could have a better chance to shine in society. They only see a little life in New York during the winter;—Mary not more than twenty or twenty-five parties a year, really;—Genevieve none at all as yet. Some people would think twenty parties enough; but now it is not, you know. They ought to go to Saratoga and Newport. A girl misses a great deal who grows up without seeing Saratoga and Newport thoroughly. I really pity the poor children when I compare their seclusion with the advantages I had at their age. And the watering-places are even better now than they were then, you know."

"Superior privileges? More water?" I asked, a little annoyed at her shallowness when my own thoughts were so grave.

"No, not that. Gracious, how you do joke, Mr. Fitz Hugh! But more society, you know; more chance of seeing the world. Oh dear me! elderly married woman as I am now, I *have* enjoyed myself superhumanly at Saratoga and Newport, especially at Saratoga. I used to be fearfully gay, Mr. Fitz Hugh,—a wild, waltzing thing, to be sure, in those days,—though I suppose you can hardly believe it, now that

I am a mother of a family and living in such a quiet, retired way."

"Marriage is a noble life," I said; "especially to those who have children. I imagine that a parent lives youth over again in his or her offspring, without the follies and consequent regrets of the first youth."

"Yes, there is something pleasant in that, I suppose," she answered hesitatingly. "Yes, one likes to see the young ones coming forward. One is able to advise them sometimes. I really love to aid the girls with my experience,—now really I do,—notwithstanding that it gives me a dreadful sense of aging. Dear me! how they would laugh at my good advice, if they only knew how gay and flighty I used to be!"

"Do they stand in much need of solemn counsel and restraint?" I asked, with what I thought exceeding boldness. "Do you ever think of building a convent for them? They are very young, and youth is heedless, everybody says."

"Yes, they are young, but not heedless, I think; not very unsophisticated, really. They are very clever," she added, after a moment of reflection. "You must live with them years, and feel some responsibility for them, before you can realize how much talent they have." (I had realized it before I had known them a fortnight.) "I don't feel yet as if I knew Genevieve thoroughly. Mary is much franker, and I can understand her better; yes, Mary is perfectly open-hearted and sincere; the dearest, best girl that ever lived. As for Jenny, she is too shrewd for me; I never saw such a keen, ready-witted girl; but she is not as prudent as her sister. I hope she will have a good husband and love him properly. After all, most women need husbands to steady them and be their safeguards. I approve of early marriages,—I do, really."

She sighed, and fell back into a pensive, almost melancholy reverie. It seemed as if she had uttered the last two or three sentences to herself, for she did not look at me, nor have the air of expecting a reply. I made none, and we

took a turn or two in silence. Her emotion, slight and shallow as it probably was, interested me for a moment, and I busied myself in questioning why she gave such an earnest, sighing approval of early marriages. Was it simply on the broad ground that she had married somewhat late, and that she felt her life to be a failure? Very likely, for she was not a woman of profound or discriminating intellect, and an imperfectly understood cause would easily account with her for a half appreciated effect. It was hardly worth while to spend much effort in divining the motions of a mind so sensational and illogical as hers. She possessed some of that social cleverness or tact which seems instinctive in woman, but otherwise her spiritual calibre was not noticeably larger than that of her cousins the Van Leers, although, as with them, the heart was better and stronger than the head. But whether she distinctly knew it or not, whether she could state it or not, it was clear that something wore on her spirit and jaded her life. Her form had an elegance of proportion not easily destructible; her face had been remarkable for that brunette beauty of regular features and sparkling black eyes, which is so lasting; but, for all that, she had faded and was fading. She frequently drew a long sigh, as if to throw off the weight of some oppressive reverie. Perhaps it was the soberness and care of married life which galled her; perhaps it was disillusion in regard to the happiness of holding a high position in society; perhaps it was only a natural though premature decay of health and spirits. An early blight of beauty is frequently the lot of young women who marry old men, and not necessarily, either, by reason of regret or of ill-treatment, but through the quiet working of the ceaseless laws of nature. Well, if this was all, Mrs. Westervelt was but paying a something for something, and need not be pitied. The Van Leers, it seems, were *parvenus*; great golden bubbles, still struggling towards the surface of society; there doubtless to shine and break and disappear, like the bubbles which had preceded them. Mrs. Westervelt had married an

elderly aristocrat to rise quicker, and was but suffering under the great and just law of compensation. Alas! I concluded, if Genevieve is in danger of falling, this is not the woman who can save her.

At her proposition we left the garden for the parlor where the family had collected. For a time the conversation was iced and slow, seeming to me in my uneasy abstraction like the talk of people whose hearts are for the moment far away from their tongues; but presently Mrs. Van Leer turned to Genevieve, with her usual quizzing smile, and uttered a few jesting words which sounded to me like the raillery of a devil.

"So you were very imprudent last evening," she drawled. "You got terribly wet, I hear, while gratifying your passion for the sublilities of nature."

Somerville glanced at the two women with an expression of surprise which was almost anger, but quelled himself instantly, and became the most polished of human icebergs. Genevieve hesitated before she answered, and then stammered out, with a frail pretence at gayety: "Oh—I—you heard of my ill luck, cousin Jule? Yes, Byron will be the death of me, some day. That Jura thunderstorm of his has bewitched me so that I never can come in when it rains. In fact, lightning always did enchant me."

"Ah, Byron!" repeated the mocking lady. "That would be very well, Jenny, if you confined yourself to Childe Harold. But I understand" (in a loud whisper) "that you have been studying Don Juan lately."

Did she mean the poem Don Juan, or the living Don Juan who stood there before me? Genevieve bit her lips in undisguisable annoyance, but sought to turn the conversation into nothingness by a jest.

"The truth is that I stayed out because I was jealous. Sissy here has gained all the hearts of the house by getting herself run away with; and I wanted to do something to draw back the general attention; catch cold and have an interesting cough, for example."

"Oh! I see," laughed Mrs. Van Leer. "You wanted the notice of our new physician. Doctor Somerville, you must pre—scribe for this poor, distracted child. By the way, Doctor, did *you* get wet last evening?"

"I, Mrs. Van Leer?" he replied with a smile as cool and sweet as an iced cream. "I was in my room when the shower came on. If I had been out, I should have begged this imprudent young lady's permission to force her into the house."

Mrs. Van Leer wanted to continue the raillery; but either his elegant composure discouraged her, or she saw some menace in his manner which I could not see; and so she held her flippant tongue. Genevieve was noticeably flushed and tremulous, and did not once glance at Somerville. Mrs. Westervelt, who was bending over a bit of embroidery in a window-seat, pretending not to heed the conversation, had become ghastly pale, as if every word were a lancet and robbed her of some portion of her life-blood. Bob Van Leer was fast to my button-hole, a beefy dead weight, perfectly *non compos* in the presence of all mysteries. Miss Westervelt had quitted the room a moment before, to bring something which she said was for me, and which I guessed to be the completed sketch of her horse-back escapade and rescue. I stood speechless, stunned with amazement, shame, and anger. Was it Genevieve, then, who had walked last night in the company of Somerville; who had sobbed and whispered to him, perhaps upon his shoulder; who had humbly and vainly implored his pity; whom he had so insolently pretended to love; whom he had called a guilty woman; whom he could threaten to ruin? The shame seemed to clutch fast hold of me, and to gnaw my heart as if she were a sister of my own. Does Mrs. Van Leer half suspect this, and does that pallid shrinking mother-in-law know it, and is it this which so often flings sorrowful shadows over the face of Mary? No, they could not have seen through Somerville; for, if they had, they surely

would not permit him to infect the house with his presence. And yet, it was possible that they might not—dared not—drive him away. His character, I now feared, was capable of any wicked extremity; and perhaps he made use of this very mystery to keep his hold on the unfortunate family: if they banished him, then he would fulfil his threat of exposure, to the ruin of one and the shame of all. They were weak and timid people, these Westervelts; all of them women by sex or women by nature; all of them together no match for him.

After these thoughts came a revulsion, and my imagination flowed back, like an exhausted billow, from the cruel stony credence upon which it had been driven. I glanced around the room from face to face, half believing that some sensitive heart would understand mine, and some merciful eye contradict my suspicions; and when Miss Westervelt re-entered, she seemed to me like a good angel, come to deliver me from a flight of bewildering demons who whispered the omnipresence of wickedness, the universal, sepulchral hollowness of virtue. There are moments of singular excitement, of which the power is perhaps exaggerated to the memory by their infrequency.

Miss Westervelt's sketch was a fine one, and I had been delighted that it was to be mine, but now it pained me. As I gazed abstractedly at the two rushing figures on horseback, they seemed to float far back from me, to become weird and unearthly, and to transform themselves into a fiend pursuing a lady. I praised the picture, smiled over it, and inwardly shrunk from it.

"I am glad you like it," she said, pleased. "I am sorry the frame is so much prettier than the drawing. You told Genevieve that you meant to frame it; and Mamma said it must be framed for you."

In the effort to control my agitation and to express in my face what was proper, genteel and suited to the exterior occasion, I must have looked absurd, for Mrs. Van Leer

burst out laughing. "Come! do speak, Mr. Fitz Hugh," said she. "I never saw a man so dum—founded by a pres—ent. Is it the first you ever got?"

"No; simply the best," I returned, taking the sketch into my own hands and holding it up bravely.

"The best, is it? Well, then, sit down and write some of your best po—etry on it. Give us an im—pomp—tu now, and Mary will copy it into her al—bum."

"Much obliged for your offer of her services," said I. "Unfortunately, I have no impromptu prepared, and it would take two or three days to write one."

"How is that?" asked Mrs. Van Leer, simply surprised. "I thought an impromptu was a piece spoken right off, pat."

Her brother burst into a loud laugh which fairly filled the house with a noise as of vanity and lies.

"Nobly avowed, Mr. Fitz Hugh!" said he. "Permit me to express my cordial admiration of your unflinching modesty."

He rose, shook hands with me, and then paced the room, speaking as follows: "But I must insist upon reproving your incautiousness, Fitz Hugh. You blight the bays of us versifiers; you dim the halo of swift inspiration which is supposed to beam from us. Ladies," (a sweep of his hand,) "in the presence of our conscientious, our heroic friend, I am impelled to confess my sins. Often and often have I travailed a whole week with a little poem, licked it slowly into shape with the industry of a Virgil, and then, at some jovial board, or beneath the romantic shades of some picnic retreat, have declaimed it as the offspring of the moment."

Here was another exasperating disclosure, if I had been in a state of mind to notice it. Hunter was a rhymester, then; a rival of mine, and perhaps a superior in the favor of the Muses; a companion in that flight by which I thought to soar above the heads of my male friends at Seacliff. In those days I magnified the office of the poet, because I

imagined that I was one of the inheritors of the divine succession. Happy days! when I believed that I should sit among the gods of song; in the lowest seat of their glorious temple, indeed, but still among them and partaking of their worship; not crowned with a whole bay tree, but at least with a sprig.

Just now I did not trouble myself about Hunter's rivalry, and in fact there was no need of it, inasmuch as his only claim to the bardic character lay in his uncommon, but not precisely poetic, faculty of invention. He had told me a day or two before, that he never wrote a line of poetry in his life; and it was a mere momentary whimsical puff of vanity, which led him now to claim the lyric halo. Many a man wears the cap and bells and walks in motley, who is capable of winning our respect, and would win it, were he not anxious to appear what he is not.

The conversation went on around me, a pattering of unmeaning words, a repetition of irksome sounds, which annoyed me, although I did not attend to it, nor catch a whisper of its object, because there was a far other and more earnest dialogue going on within me. Two voices, like two spirits, were disputing there, one of which was brave and kindly, saying "Remain!" the other cowardly and selfish, muttering, "Away!" The selfish spirit conjured up before me a house, like that of Seacliff, its doors written over with names of dishonor at which a crowd of people pointed scornful fingers, while within, peering through the windows, cunning yet reckless, depraved, cruel, and exulting, sat a demon whose face bore the likeness of Somerville. I must not stay here, I concluded; I must break away while I have the power. And even if to-morrow some new thought or revelation should come to detain me, I will still hold my heart in such iron links of will, that—no matter how mad it may go—it shall not act out its lunacy. Yes, I tossed whole chains of stout resolutions into my future, just as Xerxes flung his fetters into the Hellespont. There was extravagance in the

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cal in their nature. The rod had never alighted on him, however, for he was the only son, and more than that, the only child by the second wife.

Willie's childish glee evaporated at sight of Somerville, and sidling away from him, he took refuge with his sister Mary. I had repeatedly noticed this dislike or fear with which the boy regarded the elegant visitor, and had wondered at it, for Somerville often tried to tame him with pretty words and sugar plums.

"Well, Willie, what are you doing this morning?" said Mary. "Why don't you ride your cane? You may ride it, if you will go into the veranda."

He lifted his head out of the folds of her dress, and looked up in her face with a queer, cunning smile, which hinted at far maturer objects than toys, and was as much too old for him as his father's hat would have been.

"I'll tell you a 'tory," said he in a whisper, turning a cautious eye upon Somerville.

"No, Willie; I don't want to hear your story; you don't tell true stories; you make them up."

"Oh, but this is a true 'tory," he urged. "This 'tory is true, all the way. You hear me tell this 'tory, and then n—o—o more. Once there was a gentleman wanted to marry a laydee, and he couldn't because she wouldn't let him. Then he used to 'cold her, and push her, and 'trike her; and so the laydee used to cry and cry and be sick; and then," (here he paused as if studying out his conclusion,) "and then the laydee died, and—and the gentleman was hung."

"Willie! Willie!" exclaimed Mary, laying down her work and looking earnestly at him, as if seeking to gather from his face more than he had said. "You mustn't make up stories so; you make up naughty stories, Willie. Papa has often told you not to do so; don't you remember it, Willie?"

She caught the curious expression in my face, and ad-

dressed me: "Mr. Fitz Hugh, you mustn't mind what this child says; he is a little heedless 'tory-teller, and that is all."

Willie seemed rather abashed and peeped sidelong at me to see how much he had fallen under my condemnation. Detecting more fun than displeasure in my countenance, he brightened up, smiled deprecatingly in his sister's eyes, and offered another remark. "Now I'll tell you something all true. Mamma has lost her picture, and can't find it no—where. She thought Willie took it, but Willie didn't. It is lost."

"What picture do you mean, Willie?" asked Mary. "Not the pretty one? Not the one in the gold case?"

"Yes, the pretty one; the painted one, with gold over it, like a watch; that one. She can't find it no—where."

"Mamma has lost her miniature?" inquired Genevieve. "Nonsense! why, papa took it, of course."

"Naturally," said Somerville. "Who else has so good a right to it?"

"Of course Mr. Westervelt would take it," chimed in Mrs. Van Leer. "I al—ways remind Henry to take mine with him when he goes away from me. The poor fellow is dread—fully absent-minded on that point, and would forget it every time and so suffer abom—inably, if I didn't assist his memory. Isn't that so, Henry?"

"No, Jule. I always think of it, you know I do," returned the heavy creature, surveying her with a fond admiration which made me respect his heart at the expense of his head. "Jule is forever making fun of me," he added. "I have to keep a stiff upper lip."

"But there is another missing miniature, which Mr. Westervelt has not taken," continued the satirical lady. "It is a mere tri—fle in value, to be sure; but it is won—derfully precious, I fancy, to the gentleman who stole it."

Here I saw Bob let off a wink of triumph and happiness so emphatic that it ought to have been accompanied by a report.

"Really," pursued Mrs. Van Leer, "what woman ever

complained before of losing her miniature? That is just what we want,—to have the men run off with our likenesses, and then bring them back to swap them for the originals. I always know how matters are going to end when a girl lets a young fellow get possession of her portrait.”

Miss Westervelt blushed, but made no other response to this badinage. Evidently it was a portrait of hers which had disappeared, and I began to question quite earnestly whether Mrs. Van Leer referred to the sketch just presented to me, or to some other which had fallen into the hands of a rival. By this time Bob could contain his glee and self-gratulation no longer. He floundered into the hall, executed three or four steps of a cumbrous polka, and nodded at me through the doorway with such violence that I had some hopes that he would break his neck. Sketch in hand, I slipped out of the parlor and joined the elated blockhead. He was in the gayest state of mind and body, pounding me on the shoulders with his great fist, then ramming his hands elbow-deep in his pockets, then walking up and down chuckling.

“Did you hear about that miniature?” said he. “I’ve got it. I’m the feller. Come up stairs and look at it.”

I followed him to his room, and sat down in the midst of a saturnalian confusion of cigar-boxes, meerschaums, ale-bottles, soda-water-bottles, scent-bottles, loose corks, brushes, gloves, dressing-cases, hats, caps, boots, slippers, morning-gowns, coats, pants, foils, boxing-gloves, pistols, fowling-pieces, fish-lines, &c. &c., all spread over the bed, the chairs, the trunks, the tables, the wash-stand, the floor.

“Got a lot of things here,” observed Bob. “I never let the chambermaid meddle with ’em; she gets ’em out of their places. Upset them traps on the floor and take the chair; take a cigar too, won’t you? I’m going to. I haven’t had my first smoke yet. I was just about to light up when I heard you come in, and run down to see you. I say, you get up here bright and early every morning, don’t you, though?”

I accepted a regalia, for I felt that I needed a sedative to endure the sight of that portrait in his possession.

Unlocking a trunk, he took out of it a little package, carefully wrapped in a fine cambric handkerchief, unfolded it and exhibited a daguerreotype in a well-remembered case of crimson velvet. It was the one which I had seen and coveted on the day of the horseback escapade. The first look at the face was granted to himself, and was enjoyed with a chuckle of satisfaction, a sigh of supreme contentment, which made me envy him, hate him, admire him, and pity him, altogether. He passed it to me as carefully and reverently as he would have handled the Koh-i-noor. Unconsciously I rose to receive it, and then sat quickly down again, for either the sudden rising or the sight of that fair face in his hands, made me dizzy.

"An't it pretty?" said he with another sigh and chuckle. "I tell you I am getting my courage up, old feller. I hooked that, and carried it off right before her eyes, though it scared me awfully to do it. But I knew I must begin to show grit sometime or other, or I never should make any headway. She made up all kinds of pretty pretences that she wanted it back again, but Sis told me not to be scared, and I held on like a good one. Glad I did, by Jove! an't you, old feller? The fact is, a man mustn't believe the girls half the time when they say No, or he'll act like a fool, and they'll despise him. I tell you, I begin to think there's nothing the girls hate so much as a fool,—a regular bashful fool;—they like a confounded rascal better than a confounded fool, if the rascal has only got the brass and the brains and the manners; they do so."

"I am afraid you are correct," said I. Of course, I was thinking of the rascal who pervaded the mystery of Seaclyff.

"It an't right though, is it?" resumed Bob. "A fool may be a good feller after all, and have a first-rate heart. But for all that they can't stand him unless he has the brass and the brains and the manners."

The idea of a fool having brains and manners seemed paradoxical, but I did not think it worth while to interrupt my friend, and, besides, a contradiction might have seemed like a personality.

"An't it beautiful?" he resumed, reaching out to take back the miniature. "You have a picture of her, too, in that little drawing there. You needn't feel anyways delicate on my account, Fitz Hugh, about keeping that. I'm glad she worked it for you, and I'd rather you should have it than not, for you deserve so much. I did want it, though, till I got hold of this other. Now I'm perfectly satisfied. I say, wouldn't you like to swap, hey?"

"No, I think not," said I. "Don't you see, you dull youth, that this sketch is worth a hundred of your daguerreotype." I broke out on him with a sort of vindictiveness, because he had annoyed me by his chuckling confidence, his assumption of a monopoly in Miss Westervelt, and his stupid impudence in committing that sacrilegious theft of her portrait. "Don't you know that that daguerreotype was done by a hired artist or artist's apprentice, while this sketch is the product of her own brain, and the labor of her own hands? Don't you understand that this expresses something? that it means gratitude? Don't you perceive that it is a token of comprehension between us? that it is a link for memory? Besides, it was not stolen; it was her own gift, devised by her; it came freely and unsolicited. What do you think of that, my boy?"

A wild stare, an open mouth, and two red cheeks showed me that his thoughts were astonishment and dismay. "What! she—you," he gasped. "Old feller!—you don't mean to say that you—you are courting her?"

I had been too bold, too frank; and I turned coward and hypocrite again. What if he should take alarm, make a desperate rush to New York, and offer to lend the needy father fifty thousand or so, on condition of an early marriage with the daughter!

"Nonsense!" said I. "Don't scare yourself with a shadow, Bob. You are welcome to the daguerreotype, and to the original—when you get her."

"Oh!! well! I'm glad you an't going in for her, old chap. You scared me awfully, though, for a minute. I tell you, Fitz Hugh, you wouldn't say them kind of things if you knew how they cut me. I wish you wouldn't do it again, that's a good feller!"

"I won't," said I, and resolved to keep my promise, injurious as it might be to Bob's interests. I left the room a sadder man than I had entered it, but not a wiser, for jealousy had shattered all my resolutions of caution. Does not every sane adult know the sanctity with which a heart invests the object of its adoration? It wishes to make no proselytes to that religion; desires no concourse of fellow-worshippers; asks for no high priest, no mediator. Above all does it shrink and groan within itself when it sees another's hand venture near that image which itself only dares to admire from a distance. Yet, when it sees this, the idol seems to become doubly worshipful. Where now was my resolution of living the life of an icicle at Seacliff? Melted in a furnace hotter than that of affliction. Only to hear Robert Van Leer claim Miss Westervelt, made me feel that I could not give her up, no matter what might be contained in the cloud of mystery which shadowed her sister. And then this other thought moved me: that I was not yet certain of any error in Genevieve; that by leaving Seacliff I should only draw a veil between myself and the truth; and that thus I might do lifelong injustice to one who was perhaps as spotless as the angels. Furthermore I argued to myself that I ought to remain, in order to be the enemy, and, if possible, the conqueror of the vampire. Yes, I concluded, I will stay and guard Genevieve; not suspecting her of any evil, though watching her as closely as if I were sworn to suspicion; but tracking this man, spying out his very purposes, balking him and driving him hence.

Oh, Youth! how magniloquent it is, even in its sentiments! how rhetorical even before it has spoken! And yet, thank God for enthusiasm, the poetry of life, the prophet which shows us men and acts, not as they are in the present, but as they may be in the great future. Without the atmosphere, the skies would be blackness; without enthusiasm, life might be a colorless gloom.

8





CHAPTER XIII.

GENEVIEVE AND COUSIN JULE.

RESOLVED to let no grass grow under my feet in the path of duty. I said that I would take Genevieve in hand immediately, examine her, cross-examine her, hint at my suspicions, watch for every start of consciousness, and, if possible, terrify her from the evil way into which I feared that she had entered. All that day, and again that evening, I sought an opportunity to speak with her alone. At last, just as daylight was changing to moonlight, like an allegro dying into an adagio, I found her sitting on one of the benches which edged the cliff, gazing far away into the soft southern horizon, and listening between her thoughts to some droning piscatorial tale of Robert Van Leer's. This is alone, I thought, for Bob does not count in conversation, except as a sort of background of silence. I would have preferred a full noontide on her features, in order to note better their expression; but if the imperfect light of the hour was a friend to her face, it was also a friend to mine, and one that I needed. In truth, I trembled a little, and felt much more like a culprit than like a prosecuting attorney. Standing near her, and a little on one side, so that I could command a view of her aristocratic profile, I studied her for a moment, seeking some downcast look of unworthiness, some jaded air of concealment, some terror of discovery, some flippant bravado of guilt. There was no such evil visitor in

that young paradise; there was naught but intelligence, feeling, spir. ; and the calm pride of self-respect. Looking up at me presently with a wide-open serene eye, she broke the back of one of Bob's creeping sentences by saying, "Never mind about the other sharks, Robert. I want to ask Mr. Fitz Hugh what he is thinking of."

"Nothing," replies Mr. Fitz Hugh, as much abashed as a schoolboy detected in committing a roguery when he should have been committing his multiplication-table.

"Oh, oh! how much reflection people have given to that subject! I suppose, however, that nothing means a revery,—some poetical illusion, perhaps."

"Exactly," said I. "I have been troubled with an illusion lately; a very bad one; a perfect incubus, in fact."

"If it is so disagreeable, what makes you entertain it? Why don't you turn it off and get a more amiable one? Or, if you can't do that, why don't you give up such intoxicating things altogether,—take the pledge, as the temperance men say?"

"Perhaps I can't do either. Perhaps such changings and resignations are not within my power. It is a theory of mine that every man has his inevitable illusion. One respectable middle-aged person of my acquaintance contents himself with the chimera that his neighbor, the starveling apothecary, is in secret immensely rich. He has no reason for this whimsical article of faith; he holds it apparently by instinct, as he does the knowledge of his own identity, and about as firmly; dispute it, and you are sure of encountering a long argument, of which nothing is comprehensible but the bare words, and those only as parts of speech, not as parts of logic. You see, no man knows his own illusion; for, if he did, he would drop it. As to mine, I have the misfortune to believe that it is sober truth."

"Poor man! It seems to be a dreadful one, really. It quite unmans you. Do you suppose that your mind is sound?" laughed Genevieve.

"Perhaps you ain't well," observed Bob, with a sympathy which, though stupid, was sincere. "That's it, old feller, depend upon it. I tell you when I've eaten anything that don't agree with me, I get the blues the worst sort."

"Oh, Robert!" exclaimed Genevieve. "Accuse a poet of dyspepsia! What a horror!"

"Not so bad an idea," said I. "I fancy that a great many awful phantasms of the brain do get into it from the stomach. In fact, there is such a thing as a dyspeptic mind. Nothing digests healthily in it; acetous fermentation ensues; the man is permanently soured."

"Just so," assented Bob. "I know a feller who has the hardest kind of dyspepsia. He smokes too many cigars, and he has awful low spirits. I tell him to leave off smoking; but, you see, he can't do it. That's always the way with a feller; when he's got into a habit it sticks to him like tar and feathers."

"Do you want to know what does the whole mischief?" I asked. "It is the first cigar."

"Not a bit of it," retorted Bob. "My first cigar made me sick, and made me say I'd never smoke another,—though I have smoked a lot since then."

"Still, it was the first cigar that began the habit," said I, persisting in my puerile philosophy, for want of something better to say. "If there had been no first, there could have been no second."

"I don't see that," replied Bob obstinately. "I could have smoked the second just as easy as the first."

"Never mind, Robert, you'll see it all some day," interposed Genevieve. "I want Mr. Fitz Hugh to go on. I suppose he is only speaking of cigars figuratively. He is a poet, and uses things as the symbols of thoughts. Please to proceed, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

"I mean to say," continued I, "that it is the first step in evil which is the father of all the others and of the final ruin. I don't pretend to have discovered this truth, nor to be par-

ticularly worthy of preaching any great moral truth, even supposing that I had invented it. At the same time, I wish I were fit so to preach. I believe that I should not have to go far to find those who greatly need a sermon."

I faltered here, for I thought that I was pushing allusion to the brink of accusation. Genevieve did, in fact, stare at me, but her face expressed only surprise and then curiosity.

"Who? Mr. Fitz Hugh," she asked. "Who is it that has just taken the first step down hill? Not I, you may be sure. I am an old offender; perverse and hardened in it; no novice in naughtiness, not I. Is it Robert? Ah, Robert! what have you got on your conscience? Do confess him, Mr. Fitz Hugh, and give him absolution if he is penitent. Come, Robert, out with it."

"Out with what?" says Bob. "I don't know what you're talking about. I say, Fitz Hugh, what's to pay? What's the joke?"

"No joke at all," returned Genevieve. "Don't you see how dreadfully serious he is? Who *do* you mean, Mr. Fitz Hugh? Is it papa? Are you thinking about his unlucky speculations? I wish you could say something so very wise and so very terrible that it would make him stop speculating forever."

I was disconcerted by her gayety, and fell helplessly into the new track which she had opened for the conversation. "You are very clever," I said. "I hope you will not blame me if I think it unfortunate that your father has acquired a taste for speculation. It is not a profitable acquisition. In the long run, the chances are that he will lose."

"Make it a short run," observed Genevieve; "it would be just as true, and more striking. But how comes it so? I never heard any one explain the mystery."

"Why, it is very clear that many men must pay for blanks in order that money enough may be accumulated to furnish one lucky adventurer with a prize."

"Only rich men ought to speculate," inferred Genevieve. "Poor men can't afford the risk."

"Nor rich men either," said I, still hammering at this subject because I knew not how to get back to the one nearest my heart. "I assure you that if I were a millionaire I would not risk the first thousand in speculation. I know very well that, if I lost, I should most probably send off a second thousand on some wild-goose chase after the first. That would be the beginning of the end. Once let this devil of speculation into your head, and it is sure to run violently down some steep place into the sea. I saw a boy fishing in the creek, yesterday. He caught his hook in a root, thought he had a bite, gave a triumphant haul, and left his line under water. Aha! said I, you are a speculator."

"Did he lose his line?" inquired Bob, with a born fisherman's sympathy. "Too bad, by Jove!"

All this time I felt like a man in a railroad-car, who has found that the train does not stop at his village. I had got on this topic of speculation, and could not discover how to stop it, nor how to bring it round to that mystery for the sake of which I had sought the interview. "The boy suffered a real misfortune," I continued desperately; "whereas it is not always thus with the unlucky speculator. Often he is not a whit poorer after failure than before; he has only learned that he is not as rich as he supposed himself to be; a very unpleasant discovery, to be sure, but not exactly a calamity. Let us suppose a parallel case of a man who gets merry with wine, and fancies himself to be Emperor of Siam, lord of the forty golden umbrellas, and so forth; but, on coming to his sober senses, finds that all that Siamese business was a misconception. Has this individual any right to bewail his lost greatness, and demand his forty umbrellas again? On the whole, we ought to be thankful to Providence for sending these occasional pressures to squeeze out the nonsense, and vanity, and lies, which are perpetually soaking into society."

Did ever a preacher wander farther from his text? I felt

that I was ridiculous, although I knew that Genevieve could not see it, because she was necessarily ignorant what a gap there was between my words and my thoughts. I made a short tack, and steered resolutely into the very breakers of the mystery. "I hope you caught no cold from being out last night," I said.

She gave me a side glance, and then swept the horizon with her eyes in an absent-minded way before she answered. "No, none at all, thank you."

"It was a fearful storm," I resumed, while my temples began to throb as if the tempest had entered into them. "It was very reckless in you to expose yourself,—without cause, too."

"Of course. But then there's no accounting for girls, as my old nurse used to say. We are permitted to have freaks, you know. Why not? If Providence permits it, why not men?"

"To be sure,—to a certain degree. But when a freakish fancy risks the ruin of health, or—or anything else of priceless value, the owner of that fancy ought to shut it up, chain it, chain herself, rather than indulge it."

"Very likely," she returned, beginning to bite her nails, and then drawing her hand from her mouth suddenly as if recollecting herself.

"I know of some one else who was abroad last night," I said with a great effort.

"Who?" she asked, turning toward me abruptly, and, as I thought, eagerly.

"Myself," I meant to have said; but really I could not; the word died in my throat. After a moment of hesitation, I replied, "The principalities and powers of the air."

"Do you think I was in their company?" she asked with a laugh. "Do you suspect me of being a witch and having dealings with the principalities?"

"Yes; I do suspect it; I have grave reason to believe it."

She clearly did not understand me, for she laughed again, carelessly.

"I say, what's the excitement?" inquired Bob. "What the Old Harry are you talking about?"

"You have just named the personage, Robert," replied Genevieve.

"The devil? You don't say so! Well, now I'll tell you the greatest joke. When I was a little chug, I used to think the devil got up all the thunder and lightning; I did so, and you can ask Henry if I didn't. And it was very natural I should think so, seems to me. Lightning never does any good, that I can see; it only does harm, kills people, sets fire to houses and splits trees; and then it looks so tremendously red-hot, you know."

"Cotton Mather entertained the same views," said I. "He thought that the devil had much to do with thunder-storms, especially as so many churches were struck by lightning in his day."

"Did he, though?" inquired Bob, respectfully. "Well, who was Cotton Mather?"

"One of the old puritan divines of Massachusetts. Author of—"

"Oh, I know,—one of the blue-noses. No, hang it! not a blue-nose; that's a Nova Scotia man. The fact is, I always get the blue-noses and the blue laws, and the blue stockings all mixed up together. Now, I say, Fitz Hugh, you've read a great deal and travelled a great deal, and I want to ask you one question. What does the devil keep up the fight for when he knows he can't whip? What's the use of it, and why don't he stop it?"

"Bravo, Robert!" exclaimed Genevieve, throwing her head back in laughter until the moon shone full upon the fair features, revealing with a light that was almost saintly their childlike glee and purity. "What a theologian you are! for really a man must have some idea of theology merely to ask that question. Do try to answer him, Mr. Fitz Hugh. I have often puzzled over that point myself. Oh, yes, you can

answer him, too,—a man that has read and travelled as much as you have,—for shame to pretend ignorance!”

“Light up, Fitz Hugh, and pull away,” added Bob, encouragingly.

The evil one was not so far from my subject, I thought, and so I struck into his trail with some spirit. “Why, the truth of it probably is, that Lucifer is a grossly self-deceived individual with regard to his chances. The more immoral a mind is, the more liable to deception on moral questions. A thoroughly bad man, for instance, holds that everybody else is at heart as bad as himself, and, if not so savingly, is more firmly convinced of the doctrine of total depravity than the most devout Calvinist. Moral insanity, in short, generates more or less of mental insanity. Now, the devil, being infinitely wickeder than any human creature can be, is in proportion infinitely more subject to delusions in regard to the comparative extent and power of the two principles of good and evil. He perpetually expects to see the entire universe coming over to his party. More than this, he believes that at this very moment every saint, and even every angel, is at bottom a hypocrite. He has fully expected to catch every tempted, worried, but praying and victorious pilgrim, that ever trod the shadowy valley and passed between the lions and forded the dark river and entered with noise of hymns into the golden city. Every time that a martyr has witnessed a good confession and risen from the stake on fiery pinions to the foot of the great white throne, this irreclaimable victim of moral insanity has been as much astonished, and his ardent expectations have been as much outraged, as if the circumstance had never happened before. I don't approve, by the way, of those ascriptions of immense power which are made to this personage by some imaginative preachers. If he is in good faith and without a metaphor, the prince of this world, it seems to me that we are bound to treat him with that reverence which St. Paul recommends us to render unto all who are in authority. Now I say it without shame, and I

say it firmly, that I have no reverential feelings towards the devil."

"Nor I neither, by Jove!" broke in Bob enthusiastically. "I tell you what, old feller, that's first-rate. I say, Fitz Hugh, he must be an infernal old ass. But you've done him brown."

"He is usually considered black," said I. "But I'm glad you like my thesis. My tutor didn't. It's a scrap from one of my compositions."

"No! by Jove! is it, though? Well, I thought you was spinning it off pretty hifalutin for common talk, now. But it's splendid anyhow. And the tutor didn't like it? Well, he must have been about as great a fool as the devil. However, these private tutors seldom are great men."

"But I have another way of explaining Lucifer," said I. "You may call it my shorter catechism. I never hear him mentioned but what I think of Sairy Gamp's Mrs. Harris. I don't believe there is any such person."

"You don't!" exclaimed Bob, who was not versed in the later constructions of theology, and to whom this declaration seemed a species of atheism. "What do you think, Jenny?" he asked, looking all abroad, as if his moral ideas had lost their accustomed guardian.

"I think that Mr. Fitz Hugh used to write pretty clever compositions," said she. "He hasn't improved so very wonderfully since he got to be an Idler in Italy. Come, Robert, give us something of yours now. Let's hear a bit of your valedictory."

"Oh, Jenny, I didn't take no valedictory," returned Bob humbly. "No, no; couldn't come that; didn't kill myself with trying, either. By the way, it always struck me as queer that they didn't have five or six valedictories to a class, so as to give more fellers a chance. But then there's the trouble that they would all have to say about the same thing, which would be tedious."

"Let them all speak together," proposed Genevieve.

"Ah, but then you couldn't understand what any of them said," objected Bob.

"Yes, but it wouldn't be tedious," she replied. "On the contrary, it would be grand fun to see ten valedictorians, all spouting at once and each trying to drown his neighbor, like so many fire-engines playing on each other. I am sure the ladies would be amused; and, if they liked it, of course nobody else would dare complain."

"Oh, but that wouldn't do, no how," decided Bob imperatively.

"Never mind, then. But give us one of your compositions," said Genevieve.

"Now, Jenny, I'd like to please you, but I can't do it," responded the unsuspecting youth. "The fact is, I scarcely remember any of my own compositions; the biggest part of them was done for me by other fellers; and I found them in cigars, you know. Oh, I'll tell you the greatest joke. I handed in a piece to the Professor one day, thinking I had pleased him that time; for it was a first-rate one, if I do say it. Well, when I went after it, he asked me how long it took me to write it. Says I, it took me two days. Says he, you *are* smart; it took *me* a week. Well, Jenny, I don't suppose you ever felt so flat in all your life as I did in that single minute. The way it happened was this: I gave Dick Carter, a Connecticut feller, three bunches of real Figaro Regalias to write me a piece. Well, Dick, instead of getting it out of his own head, went and copied it out of Harper, and got hold of one of the Professor's own articles. I tell you I cut Dick's assistance after that. He wan't original enough for me."

I had been driven clear off my course, and was puzzling how I should get back again. I stood gazing at Genevieve, who laughed heartily at Bob's whimsical tale of misfortune, and whose merry eyes met mine without faltering, or even seeming to wonder at my unusual gravity. I had not laughed at all during the interview, although I had said things which bore a semblance of gayety. Is she innocent, and am I a

monomaniac, the fool of my own imagination? I questioned. I uncovered my forehead to the southwest wind,—blowing straight from the Indian paradise, humid, meflow, calming, sweet as the breath of seraphs,—and looked away over the silver-rippled Sound, oceanic in moonlight, seeking to bring Nature in some way to my aid, and thus escape out of my bounded helplessness. Let me make one more effort to probe her soul into expression, I thought, and then, if there comes to her face no response of self-accusation, let me clear her utterly and forever. But I could think of nothing to say that would fit my purpose, except another allusion to the evening of the tempest.

“Really, that storm seems to have taken a strong hold upon your mind,” she replied, looking at me rather more gravely than hitherto.

“Well, it might!” said I, my voice sinking, in spite of me, to a whisper that was absolutely theatrical. “I was out in it.”

“Were you? Where?” she asked, rising and bringing her face so near mine that I could observe every light and shadow of her emotions, and see that she was not only attentive but anxious. I watched her steadily while I replied, “What if I were here in this garden?”

“Here! You! What, here?” she repeated. “Oh, you are joking. Why, I was in the garden; I was, really. If you had been here, I should have seen you, I think.”

“Perhaps it did not occur to you to look,” said I. “Perhaps you were too much occupied with something else. You did not see me? Well, I may have been here, for all that.”

“What, Fitz Hugh!” broke in Bob, loudly, regardless of the fact that we had been whispering. “Was you really out here last night in that regular pour? why didn’t you come in and sleep with me?”

“Oh! that’s deli—cious! That’s su—perb! What a discovery!” exclaimed a voice behind us.

Before we could turn, Mrs. Van Leer bounded upon us holding up her dress to a very unnecessary altitude as she crossed the flower-beds. She laughed outrageously at first and then shook her little fist in my face with simulated anger.

"I have found out the culprit," said she. "Oh, what a detective I am! What a sly rogue he is! Really, I thought it was Mr. Somerville; but now I shall have to clear him and put you,—yes, you, sir,—in the irons. Ah! you coast my little inexperienced cousin out in a thunder-storm, and get her wet to the skin. What do you think will be done with you, sir? Don't you know that you ought to go to the penitentiary? Or do you believe that you can get off on the plea of insanity?"

"Nonsense, cousin Jule!" said Genevieve. "Don't be silly! I didn't see him. I don't believe he was here at all I was alone."

"Precisely; it is perfectly true," added I. "I did not see Miss Genevieve. In fact I haven't said that I was here."

"Oh! oh! now then I have caught you," answered Mrs. Van Leer with another burst of glee. "Those stories don't hang together. You were here, and didn't see her; and then, again, you wan't here. Don't you see that you contradict yourself? Come along; come right along with me. I can't have any collusion between the accused parties."

She caught my arm and dragged me away. It would have been ungallant to resist, and besides it would have been useless to remain, for I could not have prosecuted my examination of Genevieve in her presence. Conscious that I had learned nothing, I resigned myself to my ill-success and to Mrs. Van Leer, who hurried me, chattering all the way down the shrubbiest walks of the garden, and stopped in a grape arbor where we were concealed alike from the house and from our late companions.

"Now tell me all about it," said she, "Confess the whole extent of your wickedness. Tell me what made you do so. Perhaps I shall take pity on you, and get you par—doned at head-quarters."

"Thank you for nothing, ma'am. I am as innocent as these hollyhocks. If I was out in the rain, it was because, like them, I couldn't help it."

"Oh, what a veg—etable you are! What a green young sprout! What a little innocent po—sy. Very well; I believe all you say; you didn't mean to get wet; no, no. It must have been ve—ry embarrassing. These naughty showers are a dread—ful damper on coquetry, aren't they? But now, tell me, did you flirt ve—ry badly? You shouldn't have done so, you know, for Genevieve is a mere girl, and not a match for you. Why didn't you take one of your age? why didn't you take me, for exam—ple?"

"Don't! don't! Mrs. Van Leer!" I remonstrated. "I didn't flirt, I do assure you. I didn't see Genevieve. The whole thing is a mere blunder of Bob's. I didn't say that I was in the garden. I was merely supposing the case to Genevieve in order to pique her curiosity and tease her. I am as much astonished that she should have been in the garden last night as you can be."

"Oh! that isn't friend—ly, now; that isn't a bit gal—lant, now," she replied, in a tone of mock reproach. "Don't you know that when a woman solicits a man's confidence, she does him a fa—vor, and that the least answer he can make is a full confession? Well, I must buy your se—cret then. What can I do for you? Really, I would give almost any—thing to get a full disclosure out of you. What are you going to ask for your mystery. Now don't be too hard upon me."

She had kept hold of my arm all the while, and she now leaned upon it heavily, while her manner became still more frolicsome and coquettish. I must declare modestly that she seemed to me less bent upon penetrating my secret than upon

tantalizing me into a flirtation, as I had repeatedly seen I try to allure Somerville; and I half forgot my previous embarrassment in this new one, which was ridiculously perplexing.

"I do solemnly aver, Mrs. Van Leer, that I have nothing to tell," I asseverated, as she looked up in my face and pouted her lips with a tempting pretence of sulkiness. "I have no connection with last night's mystery, if there was a mystery; I was not even out in the rain. I watched the storm, sheltered and peaceable, in the doorway of my boarding-house. Besides, if I had a secret, you, a married lady, would not give a toss of your fan to buy it."

"Oh, you don't know us women," she replied. "We are insatiably inquisitive. Marriage satisfies only half our curiosity. Come, I would do wonders to persuade you to confess."

She brought up her right hand, joined it to her left and clasped both together over my arm. "Now what makes women love scandal so?" she continued. "What makes us willing to give so much more for a bit of fresh, hot tittle-tattle than a man would do?"

"Do you really want to know?" I asked, glad to change the conversation. "For, if you do, I think I can tell you."

"By all means tell me, and after that you will tell me the secret. Let us walk down this shady path where we shall not be interrupted."

"Listen then. A woman cares more for scandal than a man, principally because her mind and her time are more filled up than his by serious matters. Her occupations, such as embroidery, sewing, and housewifery, are not sufficient to distend her intellectual capacity, while they are often just sufficient to keep her from severe reading and reflection."

"It seems very likely, although a trifle personal," said Mrs. Van Leer.

"Now, then, here is a vacuum," I went on; "but Nature abhors vacuums, and fills them all as fast as they occur; and"

is a conscientious dentist and allows of no cavities. Well, the cheapest and handiest material for stuffing a hollow head is gossip."

"Go on, Mr. Flat—terer. I understand why we love to hear gossip; now tell me why we love to talk it."

"Change the figure then. Don't you know that a tumbler full of air is much more sonorous than one which is full of water, or lead, or gold?"

"How deli—cious! A tumbler full of gold!" observed Mrs. Van Leer.

"Well, scandal is the most ethereal of mental substances; a wind that blows nobody any good, but still only wind. Of course the lady's intellectual tumbler, having little or nothing in it but this same volatile gossip, is astonishingly resonant. Do you comprehend?"

"Per—fectly. All that gets into my empty head as easily as so much tittle-tattle. You are mon—strous civil, by the way, to tell me these pretty things. But never mind about that now; just listen to one question. Don't you think it is an abom—idable shame for the men to keep us in such a sphere, that our only means of filling our craving noddles is to pour them brim full of slan—der? Don't you believe that the strong-minded women are right? Don't you think that we ought to stand up on a level with men?"

"Of course. Why don't you? Why didn't you grow six feet high, as I did? What made you stop just when your head had got up to my shoulder?"

"Is my head just up to your shoulder?" she replied. "Really I think it must be higher. Let us meas—ure." She laid her head against the shoulder in question, raised it again, gave me a glance of provoking coquettishness, and sighed. "How hum—bling!" she said. "I admit my littleness. Please to go on; take advantage of your superiority. What about the strong-minded women?"

Oh, you veteran, seasoned, reckless flirt! I thought. I wish your Potiphar was here to make you let go of me.

My voice was getting quite husky with embarrassment, but clearing it with a hem, (which made her laugh,) I launched desperately into my subject. "A strong-minded—ha—woman, indeed. I don't believe they are serious in their professions. I don't believe they really wish to equalize the two sexes. If they do, why don't they begin at the bottom and set things right in the lower animal kingdom, before they meddle with the privileges of the human male? Why don't they get up a charitable society for sewing manes on to the lionesses, and giving the peahens as splendid tails as the peacocks?"

"Perhaps we don't want to meddle with the dirty bird and beasts," interrupted my companion.

"If they could only induce the male parrot not to wear finer feathers than the female," I prosecuted, "and persuade the cock not to crow louder or fight better than the pullet we should doubtless be shamed into following the modest example so set us by our inferiors. We should reduce our stature to five feet two, speak treble, and be afraid of thunder."

"Oh, disgust—ing!" said she. "I wouldn't have such a man about me."

"Exactly; of course you wouldn't. Now, don't you see Mrs. Delilah, how absurd it is in you to want to cut off the strength-bearing locks of Samson?"

"Ah, but *this* Mrs. Delilah doesn't want to cut them off. The most she can imagine herself as wishing is to have just such locks herself."

"Well raise them, then; but after you have got them, be contented; don't expect us to admire you then for the delicate curls of grace and womanliness that you have thrown away. At best, Mrs. Van Leer, I am afraid that your new hair would be only a wig. Now wouldn't you much rather have a husband?"

"To be sure I would, or a beau, either," she replied, bending her head as if in laughter, so as to let her braids sweep my shoulder.

Driven to recklessness, teased beyond the limits of civil endurance, I turned upon the indiscreet yet really cold-blooded creature who hung at my elbow, and uttered certain remarks, perfectly proper, I maintain, in themselves, but so odious to the average female sense of propriety on this side of the Atlantic, that I have been counselled not to report them in these pages. I spoke of what I considered the true sphere of woman; I enlarged especially upon the pains, pleasures, and glories of maternity; and I expressed myself in the plainest, bluntest words that are to be found in English dictionaries. // As I went on, I discovered that the most heedless of hoydens may be a prude, just as the most boisterous of bullies may be a coward. Mrs. Van Leer took off one hand from my arm, then the other, and finally stood a full yard away from me, although she laughed heartily.

"That will do," she said. "I fancy that you have exhausted the subject. You are a man of the world, I see. I have a great mind to tell my husband how sau—cy you are. Never mind, though; I will be discreet, if you will. Come into the house now, and let us know all about the mys—tery. Do!"

"I have no mystery," returned I. "Good-night."

Well, I had pryed but a very short way into the mind of Genevieve; but does it not often happen thus, and are not our failures as edifying as our successes? If a man should tell only the good luck that befalls him, he would make a very absurd and incomprehensible tale indeed of his experiences. It would be a Chinese picture: all lights and no shadows; bright, flat, and false.



CHAPTER XIV.

A FLIRTATION AND A FINGER-RING.

EARLY after breakfast the next morning, I saw Mrs. Van Leer prowling up and down the beach in front of my lodgings, ostensibly looking for sea-shells, but casting various sidelong glances toward my windows. She had perhaps got over her little alarm of the previous evening, and was willing to try another round or two of flirtation. Please to wait, thought I, until Beau Somerville arrives, or somebody else who has nothing on his mind, and would like to be amused by a trifle; and accordingly, she waited, while I watched her tranquilly through an opening between my curtain and the window-frame. She held her skirts very high, as if to keep the dry sand from soiling them, and showed such fresh finely-filled stockings, such small neatly-fitting bootees, as would have excited a sensation even in that paradise of the *femme bien chaussée*, the *Boulevard des Italiens*. Ma Treat came to the window once in process of making up my room, and turned away with a sniff that was vigorously significant.

“What do you think of that lady?” said I, hardly able to repress a prophetic smile at what I knew would be the answer.

“Well, Lewy, I don’t want to say nothing against nobody; but—I can’t abide her. She don’t know how to behave herself. ‘A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple and knoweth nothing;’ Proverbs, ninth, thirteenth. I wouldn’t have her to board in my house, not for silver and gold. The

capers she's capable of cutting up would disgrace a poor old brown house like our'n, though I 'spose they don't hurt a great splendid white mansion, with four chimneys and a portico. Just see the critter a-hoisting her coats. I tell you, Lewy, I think she's a regular New York fashionable hussy, there!"

Mrs. Treat, beginning with a resolution not to speak evil of any one, had waxed stronger and stronger in disparagement, until it did not seem that there was much left of Mrs. Van Leer's character. How often have the best of people opened a conversation, or even a sentence, at the top of the moral stairway, and finished it at the bottom! I laughed silently at the spiritual incoherence of my worthy nurse, but read her no stupid lecture on the sin of uncharitableness; simply proceeding to guess what was Mrs. Van Leer's opinion of herself, and then to decide what was my opinion of her. In her own estimation, doubtless, she was a superlatively attractive creature, witty, perfectly acquainted with the ways of the world, mistress of herself, much sought after by men, an overmatch for the best of them, and in no danger of coming to ill. In my estimation she was lively without being brilliant, and extremely imprudent without being demoralized. She often said smart things, but it was chiefly because she said a great many things, and did not check herself from saying anything, however free or impertinent. She never stopped to reflect; an idea scarcely entered her head before it bounded out again; she could not keep one long enough to combine it with another; and thus her little rattle-box of a skull was always pretty nearly empty. Neither good nor bad, neither wise nor very foolish, she stuck in what might be called an unhappy medium.

While I philosophized thus, I smoked my cigar and watched her coquetries with the mussels. She got out of patience at last, let go the folds of her raiment, threw away her shelly booty in a heap, and walked slowly toward Seaclyff, "with many a longing, lingering look behind." An hour afterwards I followed in her little footsteps.

"are you?" said Bob, who met me on the veranda.
p here too late, old feller. She's gone."

"Who is gone?" I asked, with some disquietude, for guiltless as I was of any intentional flirtation with Mrs. Van Leer, I had a vague fear that my last evening's conversation with that indiscreet female would bring me into trouble. Many a youthful conscience, before now, has suffered a sort of remorse because of the stains on brother or sister consciences.

"Why, Genevieve," replied Bob. "So your cake's dough, this morning. She's gone to New York, with Mary and Mrs. Westervelt,—about some shopping, of course. But you needn't feel much cut up; she'll be back again to-night. I say, how infernal stupid I was last evening! There I sat and sat, like a confounded fool, while you was talking to Genevieve, and couldn't think what you was after. If I had thought, you know, that you wanted to make up to her, I would have put off and left you alone. Why the old boy couldn't you wink at a feller?"

"Never mind," said I, tempted first to laugh in his face, and second to pull his ears until they should be as long as those of other asses. "No great harm done, under the circumstances. But what will you do to-day?"

"Oh, fishing. Going out in the yacht after dinner. Henry was going to New York with the ladies; but when he found what a grand day it was for sharking, he backed out, and sent Hunter with 'em. Sis was going down, too; but she's backed out, as well."

"Has she!" said I. My vanity suggested *why* Mrs. Van Leer had concluded to remain at Seacliff; but I resolved not to bite at her hook, no matter how temptingly she might bait it with her French bootees.

"So we've got to take her along with us," added Bob, with the look of a much bored individual. I hate to have women on hand when I'm busy fishing; they make me mad with their little squealings and fol-de-rol. I've tried it two or three times, and it don't pay. I tell you, fishing is a thing

that I want to give up my mind to. But you are a good-natured feller, Fitz Hugh; you'll bait hooks for Sis, and keep her out of the way, won't you?"

"Thank you, I should be happy to do it; but the fact is that I have some writing on hand, and I don't think that I can go."

"Oh, that's too bad, now!" groaned Bob. "Oh, I'd counted on your going along."

"Very sorry, indeed," said I. "Good-morning. I must go right at my business."

I had got a little distance away, when he roared after me, "I say—I guess you wouldn't have found your business quite so pressing if *she* had been going with us—haw haw haw!"

I knew that he meant Genevieve, but did not answer further than by casting a grin of contempt at him over my shoulder. I spent the rest of the forenoon in filling up the points of a ballad about a gentleman, who rescued a lady, who was being borne away by a black steed, who was supposed to be Lucifer incarnate in horseflesh. About eleven o'clock Mrs. Van Leer appeared on the beach, and resumed her conchological investigations; and, after a while, I heard her voice down stairs, discoursing in dulcet tones to my glumly responsive landlady. She stayed some time, talked insinuating gossip, offered to give instructions in various mysteries of the toilet, and only retreated before the inhospitable remark that it was "most dinner time, and the pot a bilin."

At two o'clock I saw the yacht glide out of the creek, with Somerville and the two brothers on deck, but no Mrs. Van Leer. In half an hour thereafter she was busy in her old field of natural history; then sauntered onwards to a little wooded point, called The Cedars; then strolled slowly and languishingly back again. Seeing her approach the house, I ran down stairs, hurried across the garden, leaped the rail-fence, and took a walk in the country; for I was resolved not to be left alone with her, chiefly, I believe, for fear that her consuming little fire of a tongue might destroy whatever

chance I had of standing well with Miss Westervelt. On returning, I met Ma Treat in the back doorway, smiling the smile of the cruel.

"Ah!" she snuffed, emphatically, "I'm glad you was gone. That *critter* has been here, and had the face to ask for you. I told her you wan't here, and I did long to say I was precious glad on't. She meant to ask for you this morning; but she dasn't. I didn't tease her to stay all the afternoon, I reckon."

"You don't mean Mrs. Van Leer?" I inquired, innocently. "What could she want of me?"

"Well, I shouldn't like to know what she wanted. I didn't ask her what she wanted. She'd better be to home, darning her husband-that's-as-stupid-as-a-block's stockings, instead of running round to see young gentlemen at their lodgings."

"Why, you don't know anything really bad of Mrs. Van Leer, I hope?"

"Well, Lewy, Pa Treat has the same opinion of her that I have; he says that he's afraid she's a real wild heifer. You keep shy of her, Lewy, or she'll make trouble for you. She's a regular New York character; she don't know how to wear her clothes decent; that's what she don't."

A significant motion at her neck and shoulders explained Ma Treat's meaning.

Was this inconsiderate woman in love with me? Not a bit of it, most probably; she only meant to amuse herself. But why had she not tried her coquetry on me before? It is difficult to say; we are a freakish set, men and women; we are subject to whims as unreasoning as dreams. Have not I, in my bachelor life, known this or that young lady for weeks, months, years, and never thought of flirting with her, and, all of a sudden, the caprice has come upon me, and I have flirted? Is an author bound to understand everything that everybody does, and present sufficient reasons therefor? Why, people are not always able to give an account of their own actions. For poesy's sake, let the world occa-

sionally accept a circumstance that is mysterious, that is unpremeditated, that is incalculable. For my own part, I do not pretend to see through the half of what happens. Well, was Mrs. Van Leer to blame for her nonsense? Of course; but so was her husband partly to blame for it; he had no business to spend nearly all his time in fishing, hunting, playing euchre and drinking mint-juleps. He unquestionably admired and loved his wife; but he was too "hossy" a character to endure a drawing-room long, even for the sake of her company; and so he left her more than was prudent to seek her pleasure in society that was often detrimental to the purity of her manners, if not of her soul.

About the middle of the afternoon, the long-drawn shriek of the New York express train came to me like music. I ran to a back window, which commanded the Rockford road, and leaned out of it for twenty minutes or more, until I saw the Westervelt carriage, brimming over with bonnets and feminine drapery, spin through the dusty hollow, and disappear behind the maples which flanked the bluff. Of course, I was in the Seaclyff veranda at a ridiculously early hour of the evening. Mrs. Van Leer received me with a curt nod and a curious little grimace, which seemed to say, "You have behaved shamefully, and thrown away an opportunity that will not be offered you again." Almost any young man feels cheap when he has laid himself open to a charge of lacking in spirit and gallantry; and, accordingly, I tried to gloss over my conduct with an apology, which, like many apologies, was only founded on fact.

"So, you did not go in the yacht, Mrs. Van Leer? I am really glad of it, for a very selfish reason. It relieves the regret which I felt at not having gone in it, myself."

"I wish I *had* gone," she replied, energetically. "I have been miserably lonesome all this afternoon. I was actually reduced to call at your lodgings, and ask for you, in hopes that you would devote a few moments of your useless existence to my amusement."

A FLIRTATION AND A FINGER-RING.

"Oh—ah—yes," said I. "Mrs. Treat told me that you inquired about me; but then, you know,—why, of course, I felt obliged to consider it a mere inquiry of friendship."

"Not in the least; no benevolent feeling at all, sir; not a bit anxious about either your health or happiness. I wanted you simply for my own recreation, till the family got back. So, you were out on a walk?"

"Yes; the adverse gods had inveigled me away just a few moments before your call. I hope you found Mrs. Treat pleasant company."

"The company of Mrs. Treat is no treat at all. She is a pure unadulterated tartar! a perfect dose! I wouldn't live under her roof for any—thing, and I wonder you dare do it. I don't believe she would stick at murder, if she took a spite at a person."

I could hardly help laughing outright, as I compared the opinions which these two ladies had formed of each other on the briefest and most imperfect opportunities for mutual observation. Women eternally judge of character by instinct; and their instinct is a wonderfully sure shot, I admit, as long as it is unbiassed by feeling; but no archers can be worse than they when their hearts are interested whether by affection or anger. We men judge coldly, phlegmatically, repeatedly, and, after a long while, correctly.

Mrs. Westervelt and the two young ladies present^{ly}, joined us. I dreaded to meet the eye of the elder sister, for fear that Mrs. Van Leer had described to her our interview of the previous evening, and so impressed upon her the idea that I was a wild youth, of extremely naughty manners, and dissolute conversation. No such charge had been preferred against me; or, if preferred, it had been charitably disbelieved. Those blue eyes were kindly, and that dimpled smile spoke welcome. I placed a cane settee for her in such a way that the trembling leaves and drooping trumpets of the honeysuckle might encircle her head, and the last florid light of the west might tint her cheek with a more than in-

carnate beauty. Mrs. Van Leer posted herself beside ~~me~~ and watched us both with a quizzing sauciness which was undisguised, rampant. The rest of us fell into the iron chairs of imitation rustic work. Genevieve looked tired, complained of a headache, said little, and would have been downright waspish, I imagine, but for my presence. Don't we men control our passions before the ladies, and even play the amiable, when we are cross enough to kick a little boy down stairs?

The Van Leer sloop was close in shore, followed at a short distance by a yacht schooner. The dying breeze of sundown favored the smaller vessel, which gradually drew ahead, and ran into the creek, while its competitor, giving up the race, veered away in the direction of Rockford. When the Van Leers and Somerville appeared, they immediately ordered out the double carriage, and invited Mr. Hunter and myself to join them in a drive to Rockford.

"What are you going to Rock—ford for? Now what is the use?" demanded Mrs. Van Leer.

"Oh, just a supper; chicken salad and champagne; that's all," said her husband, as if it were very little. "That was Buster's yacht that we come in with. We beat him, and he treats. Perhaps we shan't be home till late, my dear; not till about ten."

"That means twelve, or two, I suppose," remarked the lady, snappishly. "Well, what are we women to do? Suppose rob—bers attack us, now?"

"Why, it appears that Mr. Fitz Hugh chooses to remain," interposed Somerville. "I wish I had the grace to be half as gullant a man. If the Forty Thieves chalk your door, Mr. Fitz Hugh will immediately chalk all the doors along the sea-coast. That will keep them busy otherwheres until at least morning."

"And if the robbers come, why just keep a stiff upper lip, my dear," said the husband. "Give 'em a piece of your mind, and hit 'em across the face with your fan."

"Indeed, I shan't resist," replied the lady, half jesting, half sulky; for she was a most sociable creature, and disliked to see people go out of her presence. "I shall do my best to be perfectly fascinating. I give you my word that, if the robber chief is handsome, I'll elope with him."

At this sally Henry roared with delight, as he always did when his wife said anything particularly reckless or saucy. In a minute more the wheels of the carriage grated over the gravel of the road, rattled down the hill, and went droning away, faintly, fainter still, in the evening distance.

Meantime the ladies had begun to talk of dress. Mrs. Van Leer put the Westervelts through a catechism concerning the day's shopping: what they had seen and where, what they had bought and what refused to buy, what was worn and who wore it: a conversation of divers stuffs and many colors, silks, berages, muslins, pink, rose, blue, green, and crimson.

"Well! I declare that Mr. Fitz Hugh is the most impudent of men," suddenly observed Mrs. Van Leer. "There he is, laughing at us for talking about the bare necessities of life. Only last evening he was abusing the strong-minded women to me. Now he is sneering at us for weak-minded women. There is no pleasing these men; and I, for one, can't bear them."

"I hope Mr. Fitz Hugh is charitable," said Miss Westervelt. "I hope he will consider that we have to make our own dresses, or at least to plan them."

"Certainly; it is an all-sufficient explanation," I admitted. "If manifest destiny, or whatsoever other great law of nature had obliged me to fashion my own raiment, I don't doubt that I should have given much meditation to coat-collars, cuffs, and gaiters. My soul would not have been above buttons. I am duly grateful to the star of man's fortune, that it has furnished the world with tailors."

"Why, what a charming theory!" said Mrs. Van Leer. "Actually, I never understood before why women care so much for dress, and men so little. How clever you are, Mr.

I—dler, and how well you have improved your lazy time! Come, you shan't be left there moping alone any longer; you shall walk in the garden with me.—Now, see how easily I am distracted from the lesser moralities," she continued, in a whisper, as she rose and took my arm. "It is my duty to sit still and think of my absent husband; but it is my pleasure to promise with you."

She was beginning to court me again, and I grew desperate. "But, I thought that you lived solely to love, honor, and obey," said I.

"Never! I have nothing to do with those obsolete notions. I feel quite hurt that you should suppose it. Come along. How slow you walk!"

She had got me to the other end of the veranda, and was about to spirit me away into the shadows and silences of the garden, when I heard the front gate open, and saw two figures enter it.

"Ah! here is amusement, Mrs. Van Leer; here is a gratification for you," said I. "Your friend, Mrs. Treat, and her grandson have come to call on the quality, as she styles you. Let us get our seats again before the audience opens."

She was but half pleased at the idea, but I hurried her back to the settee.

With a brief but solemn courtesy, at the same time ducking Johnny's head with her hand, Ma Treat entered the veranda. "Good-evening, Mrs. Westervelt; and, good-evening, young ladies; and good-evening to you, Mr. Fitz Hugh," said the nice old person, with something of a bashful flutter in her voice, yet retaining the presence of mind to scorn and crush Mrs. Van Leer with the very curtest of speechless recognitions. I handed her a chair, for which she thanked me as formally as if we were perfect strangers. She was evidently a trifle more embarrassed than she meant to be in the presence of the quality, and needed that counsel with regard to a stiff upper lip which Mr. Henry Van Leer was accustomed to dispense among his acquaintance. Miss Wes-

tervelt put her a little more at ease by calling up Johnny, and treating him to the hospitality of sugar-plums.

"Much obleeged to ye, Miss Mary, though I seldom allow him to eat 'em, because they are so bad for the stomach," said Ma Treat. "Johnny, tell her much obleeged, and mak a bow."

Johnny gave vent to an inarticulate mutter of gratitude, and made a bow from the nape of his neck upward. He then craftily retreated behind Miss Westervelt to craunc his gum-drops, knowing full well that if he came within reach of his grandmother, they would be seized upon by her, and laid up until some future time, perhaps as distant as the millennium, when he should be a good boy.

"Really it is so hard to teach these young ones manners," observed Ma Treat. "If manners were only vouchsafe them as freely as appetites, what a mercy it would be! But that ain't what I come here to say, Mrs. Westervelt. I suppose you're kind of almost surprised to see me here, now."

It was known that Ma Treat felt a little sore at not being urged and pushed daily to make herself intimate at the mansion; and therefore Mrs. Westervelt threw an uncommon stress of friendship and hospitality into the tone of her reply.

"Surprised! Dear me! no, Mrs. Treat. It seems quite natural to see you here. I am delighted that you have made us a call, now really."

"Well, I'm much obleeged to you, to be sure. But I didn't exactly come to make you a call, nuther. Perhaps you've lost something valuable lately, some of you ladies."

"Lost? Oh! now Mrs. Treat has found my emerald," exclaimed Genevieve. "Haven't you, Mrs. Treat? A ring with a bright green stone in it, wasn't it? Oh, I'm so delighted! Where was it? Is it broken?"

With a look of vast pleasure and consequence, Ma Treat drew out of her pocket a small white handkerchief, rather coarse but clean, untied a corner of it in silence, and held it between her thumb and forefinger a handsome emerald ring

"That's it, that's it," said Genevieve, springing forward to receive it. "Oh, I'm ever so much obliged to you. Where did you find it?"

"Why, you see, Miss Genevieve, it was found this evening. Johnny here run down to the crick to see the sloop come in; and when the gentlemen got ashore, he followed 'em a'most up to the house; and he picked up the ring, he says, right in the path, as he was going back. But as he didn't see anybody drop it, he didn't know whose it was, and so he run right to his granma with it, for he's a good little boy—." Here she checked herself, and added in a glum voice, meant to bring down Johnny's spiritual pride,—"*Sometimes* he's a good boy; not *always*."

"Oh, Johnny! why, come here, Johnny," said Mrs. Westervelt, dulcetly. • "I must make you a present, Johnny."

She drew a port-monnaie from her pocket; but Mrs. Treat waved Johnny back with proud resolution.

"No, I thank you, mum," she said. "I'd ruther not, mum. He's our little boy, and we've taught him not to take coppers from nobody."

Looking in her face with a laugh of friendly defiance, Mary Westervelt seized the port-monnaie, picked out a quarter-eagle and handed it to the crouching juvenile behind her, who took it with the same nod and grunt with which he would have accepted a gum-drop. "There, Johnny, take that; and tell your grandpa to give it to Santa Claus for you; and when Christmas comes, hang up both your stockings and see what the old fellow will bring you. Hold on to it tight, Johnny."

"Oh, Miss Mary! well, you do come round a person so!" said Ma Treat, yielding in the most docile manner imaginable, and supposing, as I afterward learned, that the piece was sixpence or a shilling. "Well, I reckon he must have it. Johnny, say much obleeged and make a bow; and you may kiss Miss Mary's hand, too, I guess."

Johnny kissed the little white hand with a resounding

smack that made the ladies laugh, and filled me with envy.

"Well, mamma, I suppose you won't give me any more jewelry, since I lose it so easily," remarked Genevieve laughingly. "Mamma gave it to me five days ago, and I lost it yesterday," she explained to me. "I don't see how it could have got down by the creek, though; I haven't been there since we had our last sail. Mamma, I am perfectly sure that I left it in your room; yes, perfectly sure. You must have put it on, and lost it yourself."

"No, Genevieve! I am positive not," replied Mrs. Westervelt earnestly. She had a troubled air, and I did not wonder at it, for she must have suspected, as I did, that the ring had been in the possession of Somerville. How was it possible that this mystery, this hateful intrigue, black and blind and incredible as it was, could writhe its folds, day after day, through her household, and she not be aware of it?

At this moment Willie Westervelt danced into the veranda, closely pursued by his nurse, who was bent on putting him to bed.

"Why, Willie!" exclaimed Mary; "up yet! Why, Willie, go to bed; run off quick; go to Bridget."

Mary governed Willie very nicely; his mother never tried to govern him at all; Genevieve sometimes snubbed him, sometimes petted and spoiled him.

"No, no! don't want to go;—don't want to go," whimpered the little fellow. "Wanto see Gramma Treat; wanto see Gramma Treat and Johnny."

"Yes, yes, he sall see his Gramma Treat," said my landlady, drawing him up to her knees. "He sall set up a little minute and see his Gramma Treat, the dear little creetur! He calls me Gramma, you know, Miss Mary, because Johnny does. Johnny being the oldest boy is a kind of an ensample to him. Ah, Johnny! Johnny! I wish you felt your responsibilities. You don't know how much you've got to answer for."

The hardened young sinner regarded his grandmother with

blockish,—shall I say fiendish?—indifference to his responsibilities, and continued to suck a gum-drop. She shook her head at him with an air which seemed to say that his impotence alone was enough to postpone the restoration of the Jews to Canaan. Willie meanwhile climbed into her lap as a place of refuge from Bridget, and peered into her serious, good-natured old face, with that tranquil, shrewd, humorous smile of his, which gave his small mouth such an individuality. He seemed to be gauging her character, and speculating how far he could venture upon her credulity.

“Gramma,” said he, “I’ll tell you a ’tory.”

“Willie! Willie! be careful!” interrupted sister Mary.

“Yes, yes; he sall tell his ’tory,” cried Ma Treat; “the dear little man sall tell his ’tory; and his gramma and Johnny sall hear it. Johnny come to me and hear Willie tell his ’tory.”

Thus provided with an appreciative audience, the young *improvisatore* struck out boldly. “Once there was two fools—”

“Well that’s like enough, anyhow,” observed Ma Treat cheerfully. “‘Fools make a mock at sin:’ Proverbs, fourteenth, ninth; and there’s crowds of such, I’m afraid. Go on, little man.”

“Once there was two fools,” resumed Willie. “One was a man and the other was a woman, and they got married.”

“Dear me, what awful fools!” laughed Mrs. Van Leer.

“They couldn’t help getting married,” continued Willie, solemnly; “it was ordained they should get married.”

“Matches made in heaven,” said Mrs. Van Leer, excessively amused.

“And they had some children, and all the children were fools,” the infant went on.

“‘He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow:’ Proverbs, seventeenth, twenty-first,” quoted Ma Treat.

“And finally a naughty gentleman ran away with the woman fool, and then the man fool killed himself, and then

the children used to eat their victuals on the floor, and finally they hadn't any more victuals,—and so—and so they all 'tarved to death."

"Dear me! dear me!" exclaimed the good woman, quite shocked. "That's an awful story, to be sure. Verily, fools die for want of wisdom: Proverbs, tenth, twenty-first. But where in the world did that happen, Miss Mary?"

"Ah, Willie!" said Mary, "go to bed, now. I told you not to tell any more stories. You tell such naughty stories, Willie!"

"But how on earth did the child get hold of that ridiculous idea of foreordination?" broke in Mrs. Van Leer. "Who ever thought of a baby five years old talking about things being foreordained? I never heard anything so ridiculous?"

"I told him that, if you *please*, mum," returned Ma Treat, with severity. "I instructed him in that blessed doctrine, mum; and a great comfort I believe it will be to him, mum. Ridiculous or what not, it's in the Bible, mum, and *you* can't get it out. For there were certain men who were before of old *ordained* to this condemnation: Jude, fourth. And as many as were *ordained* to eternal life, believed: Acts, thirteenth, forty-eighth. I told him whatever is to be, Providence ordains that it shall be; and I say Amen! mum; and I'm very glad the little creetur agrees to it, if his elders don't."

Having withered Mrs. Van Leer, Ma Treat addressed the rest of us with conspicuous mildness. "But it's dreadful curious to remark the blindness of the nateral man to spiritual truths. I saw an instance of that awful blindness in this dear little creetur himself. One day he was down to our house when there was a funeral went by. And so I undertook to tell him what death was, and how there was a dead man in the coffin, and how they were going to put him in the ground and bury him. But, says I, they can't bury the whole of him; they've only got the body inside of the coffin, says I; all the rest of him has gone to heaven. (For it was

our good Deacon Church-that-lived-at-Swampcut's funeral; and I knew that he'd got to the right place at last; though he was cur'ously out of place in the deaconship, because he wasn't a very smart man.) Well, about a month after that, it happened that Willie was down to our house when another coffin went by; and I overheard him explaining the whole thing to Johnny here. Johnny, says he, they've got a dead man in that coffin; they're going to bury him up in the ground; but, Johnny, says he, they ha'n't got the whole of him; they've only got the body inside of the coffin; the head and legs have gone to heaven."

We burst into a shout of laughter. Ma Treat looked astonished that we could find anything humorous in what was to her an instance of the blindness of fallen man and the deceiving malice of the devil. Her only remark, however, was that it was high time the little creetur should learn to say his catechism. Curiosity presently revived, and she added: "But, Miss Mary, what was that, now,—that story about the fools? Where on earth did such an awful thing happen?"

"Inside of Willie's head," responded Mrs. Van Leer, delighted to discomfit her late reprover. "Nowhere else, you may be sure, Mrs. Treat. He is forev—er fooling people with his little fic—tions."

Ma Treat's countenance swelled with astonishment and shrunk with mortification, settling down at last into an expression of anger, half religious, half secular, like the letter-press of the New York Observer. She saw the jeering triumph of Mrs. Van Leer, and she remembered, perhaps, that the child had told her many other wonderful stories, and that she had always granted them unlimited credence. Willie's cunning smile disappeared before her awful frown, as a playful kitten whisks out of sight at the approach of a bulldog.

"What! and does this little boy tell lies?" she exclaimed, in her theological tone. "Does he make up naughty, wicked lies, and tell them to his mother and sisters and gramma?"

Oh, naughty little Willie! What if the father of lies should come after him! What if the great roaring lion, the devil, should come after him! And all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: Revelations, twenty-first, eighth."

Willie struggled down from her lap in great haste, and sought refuge from the lion in Bridget's apron.

"The devil! the great wicked devil!" repeated Ma Treat, as grimly as if she were that roaring personage. "He owns all the naughty boys that tell lies, and he will come after them; for he walketh about seeking whom he may devour: First Peter, fifth, eighth."

Willie burst into a whimper, and rushed toward his room, followed by Bridget. Mary ran after him, and we heard her trying to comfort his frightened little heart with the promise that she would stay by his bed till he was asleep. At the sweet sounds of that pitying voice, Mrs. Treat melted and began to apologize.

"Why, I'm sorry I made the poor creetur cry so," said she. "I guess I was a leetle too hard on him, not knowing his tender feelings; for Johnny here ain't a bit tender. I can't scare *him* with the devil. Oh, I wish to goodness I could! The fact is, I was piously educated in the good old way, Mrs. Westervelt; and I suppose I'm a leetle stiff in my ideas,—a mite too severe perhaps."

"Not at all,—not at all, Mrs. Treat," said Mrs. Westervelt amicably. "Very proper, I am sure. Willie certainly is very singular,—a most extraordinary child,—and I have no doubt he ought to break off that habit."

"Well, I must be going," replied Mrs. Treat. "Come, Johnny; tell the ladies good night. And good night for myself, too, ladies. Kiss the poor little creetur for me, Miss Genevieve, and ask him to forgive his old gramma for talking so harsh to him."



CHAPTER XV.

A FRIGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

WHEN half an hour Mary returned to the veranda, saying that Willie's troubles were over.

"Well, now I shall put an end to mine," observed Genevieve. "I am going to bed."

"Don't Jenny. Wait till the rest of us go; wait till our men come home; won't you, please?" pleaded Mary.

"No, I won't please," returned Genevieve, always particularly unamiable after any unusual fatigue or excitement. "The railroad has given me a splitting headache, and I won't make it worse to oblige anybody. There! do take your hands off me,—I'm *so* hot!"

Without replying, Mary put out her lips for a kiss, and Genevieve gave her one of the sulkiest. This little aside passed in the front hall, unmeant, perhaps, for my eyes and ears, but not quite occult, nevertheless, inasmuch as I had just lounged into the garden and stood in front of the doorway. If Genevieve must snap at somebody, why should she select her unoffending sister to bear the bite? For two good reasons: in the first place Mary was the person who happened to be nearest her at the moment; in the second place, her nature was temptingly gentle and uncombative; for your feminine bully almost always selects a quaker antagonist. By way of a general observation, and without special reference to Genevieve, I remark that nearly all our quarrels are

with our friends, of course, inasmuch as our enemies (if we are so distinguished as to boast any) usually pass by on the other side, while indifferent persons have too few subjects in common with us to render a tiff often possible. If a man at the close of his life could count up all the hard words that he has uttered, he would find, I suspect, that the majority of them have been vented on his intimates and well-wishers. Not that humanity is a bad thing, however: it is juxtaposition which is to blame: without contact, no friction.

Genevieve marched off, and the rest of us remained as we were. At ten o'clock, as the moon went down, the south wind rose rapidly, driving before it an army of clouds swift and sombre; and in an hour more, although not cold nor exactly stormy, it was as boisterous as a summer night could be without rain or thunder. I rose once to leave, but Mrs. Van Leer had become timorous, and protested that I should not stir until the gentlemen returned, declaring, that she would follow me home rather than stay with no one but women. Accordingly, I sat down again, cunningly taking care to establish myself on the same settee with Mary. Presently the idea that some prowlers might be looking at her from behind the garden thickets, frightened Mrs. Van Leer from the veranda; and dragging Mrs. Westervelt after her, she retreated into the parlor, where she could hardly be dissuaded from closing the doors and bolting the heavy wooden shutters. Nothing could induce her to sit by a window; she was afraid that a murderous hand would be slipped in and laid on her shoulder; and so she crept into a corner, beyond the longest arm's length of the awful out-doors. It was by way of keeping up her spirits, I suppose, that she talked of all the murders that she had ever heard of, dwelling especially on such as had been perpetrated in the country. Some of her stories were ghastly enough to make a timid person's skeleton walk straight out of his flesh with fright. She soon infected Mrs. Westervelt with her childish terror; and there they both sat, as white as if they had been comfortably murdered for an hour or two.

SEACLIFF.

All this tended to leave me in a pleasant situation. I was the side of my houri, alone, and could talk to her without interruption. I was visible from the parlor, but dimly; visible, but imperfectly, for I dared to speak low. Had I been on my knees to Miss Westervelt, or committed any other similar absurdity, I doubt whether either of the two married ladies would have had the presence of mind to be surprised at it. Once I heard Mrs. Van Leer whisper that she only had her Bible, she would like to read a chapter, but oh, if that pious Mrs. Treat would come back and sit with them! At most times I should have smiled to hear the girl wishing to turn monk, but then I only noted the remark which that quick, stealthy mental touch which so often lays an idea in the memory when consciousness is not aware of it.

‘So you are not afraid?’ said I, addressing Miss Westervelt.

‘No. I might be, however, if you were not here. Cousin George is absolutely contagious; and the house is well situated for a romance, bloody or otherwise. Don’t you think so? It is so lonely, that strange things might happen in it without being seen or heard by the rest of the world. Then it is on the side of the sea, so that pirates could land at it and their serious boats put out from it laden with dead or living victims. Then what grand nights we have for tragedies! Such nights as this, for instance, with the wind and the sea conspiring to drown every cry for help! roaring, foaming heights, when the waves rush on the rocks like murderers! There is one thing more. The house is conspicuous, so that the country people could point it out from a distance, and strangers could get a view of it without taking the trouble to hire the cars. Don’t you think we have advantages?’

‘Great! I wonder that nobody has had the taste to improve them.’

‘Ah well! I have sometimes had a feeling that something would happen here,’ she continued, speaking low, and with a

faint tremble in her voice. "It is an instinct with me; very, very absurd, of course; but it sometimes scares me."

"I have had the same feeling," replied I; "yes, and more than that, an idea that something fearful is going on here, from day to day; something which you do not see, and which I do not see, although I am conscious of its presence."

"I beg of you!" she said, imploringly. "You startle me. You talk and look too much in earnest."

She seemed so troubled, that I relented and tried to reassure her by smiling and by a tone of jest. "Don't look so grave, Miss Westervelt. The mystery, if there be one, may be ludicrous instead of serious. Luckily for the world, more farces happen in it than tragedies. Thackeray insists that every house has its closet with a skeleton in it. I think, with due deference to so great a philosopher, that he would have come nearer the truth if he had asserted that one house in ten has its skeleton, while the other nine have each a punchinello. Unfortunately, the laugh of the punchinello is transitory, while the grin of the skeleton is terribly enduring."

"Who is our punchinello?" she asked. "You don't mean Robert? Poor fellow! I won't laugh; he is too good-hearted to be ridiculed; he truly is. I hope you give him credit for a good heart."

"I do, I do, most certainly. I give him credit for the best of intentions."

I was, however, very uncharitably delighted to find that Miss Westervelt claimed nothing more for Robert than that "good heart" which is so well spoken of in this world and so much despised. By the way, does any one wonder that we both thought of Robert as the family punchinello, and not of Hunter, who was our real buffoon? Let it be observed that Hunter was no suitor of Miss Westervelt's and no rival of mine, so that he exacted little of our attention compared with Robert, who haunted both of us like a clumsy nightmare, at once laughable and terrible.

“What a pity that we can’t all be clever!” was her next remark.

“What a pity that the valleys can’t all be as high as the mountains!” returned I.

“I know it. If we were all eminent, there would be no eminence. Still, one can’t help regretting that Robert’s good heart could not be mated with an equally good head.”

“Excuse me, I can help it very easily; in fact, I don’t care at all to have him clever,” I replied boldly.

“Why not?” she asked surprised, and then added rapidly, without giving me time to answer the question, “Oh, I was going to say—let me see—that Robert is, at least, intelligent enough to perceive his own want of capacity and to lament it.”

“Yes, and I respect him for it. A humble genius is certainly one of the noblest moral and intellectual spectacles possible. But a humble numskull is also a beautiful sight to behold. Yes, a simple head, meekly conscious of its simplicity, mourning over the fact daily, and, as it were, asking pardon for it of its fellows, is in my eyes little less than venerable.”

“What an ingenious compliment! I am afraid that you are ironical; but you ought to be sincere; Robert deserves as much as that. However, it still seems to me a pity that any good people should be simple, or that any bad people should possess great talents.”

I thought at once of Somerville, and consequently of the mystery. I must be cautious,—I must not commit myself, I reflected,—until that cloud is cleared away, and I know whether I can venture my happiness in this family without risk of grievous shipwreck.

“It does seem a moral blunder of providence,” I said aloud; “at least it seems such to our imperfect human vision. By the way, I am anxious to ask you one question. Did you ever wonder that manly beauty, social tact, and brilliant faculties had been conferred upon—well, I may as well say it boldly—upon Mr. Somerville?”

“Mr. Somerville?” she said with a disturbed air. “Mr. Somerville?” she repeated, as if to gain time to collect her thoughts. “But you don’t mean to hint, I hope, that he puts his advantages to a bad use.”

“I have certainly suspected him of it. Frankly, I have no confidence in him.”

“Are you not afraid that you are uncharitable?” she murmured after a little silence. “I am surprised. I have never heard you talk in this way before.”

“Don’t believe that I talk thus often or of every one,” I exclaimed, for I shrank at the thought of not appearing kindly and noble to her. “Let me explain to you what I feel and mean. Have you never had an instinctive aversion to this or that person,—a dread of him even,—without knowing what evil thing to allege against him? You have? Yes, I know it; all women have had that feeling; most men also. Now, have you not afterwards felt a curiosity to learn whether your antipathy was well founded, and whether others shared it? I think you will allow that such an impulse is natural and excusable. Will you not?”

“Yes,—yes.—I understand you,” she replied, slowly and thoughtfully; “I do most certainly excuse all that you said. I will not repeat it, either; for I am sure that you do not wish me to. As to my own opinion of Mr. Somerville,—I cannot tell what to answer. I don’t quite comprehend him; he is a strange man to me. I ought not to say that I dislike him; for, although I have been acquainted with him several years, I still know very little of him; and besides, he is a guest of ours and an old friend of mamma’s. He was her lawyer once, and the manager of her property. But that was before she married papa.”

“I imagine that he pays very little attention to his profession.”

“I suspect so,” she replied, absent-mindedly. “I wish he had more to do; then he would not come here so much.” She recollected herself, and added, “But I do not *know* anything against him.”

"I told you," resumed I, "that I had an instinctive consciousness of some hidden drama which is enacting in this house, or at least in this neighborhood. I refer that consciousness chiefly to the presence of Mr. Somerville. I feel that he brought the spell of mystery with him, and that if he should go away forever it would be broken. If there is an evil genius in human shape among us, it is he."

"Mr. Fitz Hugh! you alarm me. Don't talk to me so, if you please. I *do* doubt him; I *am* afraid of him; and yet,—and yet, what has he done? Don't let us speak of it any more. I am getting as timid as Mrs. Van Leer."

I leaned forward to obtain a view of the two ladies in the parlor. Mrs. Westervelt was growing somniferous in spite of her alarms, and would doubtless have been asleep already but for the pettish remonstrances and shakings of her companion, who loved company in misery even more than at other times. Mrs. Van Leer sat bolt upright and broad awake, her black eyes wide open and glancing perpetually from window to window with a ludicrous watchfulness.

"Why don't you come in and close up the house?" she asked impatiently at sight of my face. "You will catch your deaths of cold, out there."

"No danger," I replied. "I will get a shawl, however, for Miss Westervelt."

Stepping into the parlor and picking up a light crape affair, which lay on an ottoman just as the tired Genevieve had thrown it down, I returned with it to my lovely fellow-watcher. She let me draw it over her shoulders and fold the ends loosely across her neck. Once or twice, perhaps intentionally, perhaps not, I touched those shoulders in arranging the fragile drapery, and though the immediate contact was but with a boddy,—a fragment of silk,—yet my brain spun in its secret chamber as madly as a whirling dervish. All recollection of the mystery was dissipated when I resumed my seat beside her. Somerville, Genevieve, Robert, Mrs. Van Leer, the plaid dress, the words spoken on the night of

the storm, the private advertisement, everybody, everything, dislodged from my thought in that moment, blew away and was forgotten like last year's thistle-downs. Yet I sat silent and unable to speak ; it seemed as if my very mind had lost its voice.

"They stay a long time at Rockford. It must be near midnight," said Miss Westervelt.

"I bear them no ill-will for it," I replied. "They are doing me the greatest of favors."

It was Miss Westervelt again who had to break a terrific silence. "But you ought to pity Cousin Jule. There she is, frightening herself nearly to death."

"Cousin Jule is a ninny," said I. "She hasn't half the cause for alarm that I have."

I wanted to be asked what cause for alarm I had ; and Miss Westervelt knew that I wished it, or she would have been no woman ; but she either did not choose or did not dare to gratify me. Her reserve piqued me, and disheartened me also, for I took it as a reproof to my forwardness. Back ran my wits, like Mistrust and Timorous at sight of the lions, rolling down the hill Difficulty clear into the slough of Despond. Some ignoramus of women and manners has observed that faint heart never won fair lady. I should like to know what truly earnest and noble heart ever won its lady without at least a dozen faint turns before it achieved victory. Recommencing the dialogue in a spirit of contemptible politronery, and trying to assume an air of mere jesting, I observed that Mrs. Treat's remarks concerning a certain evil perambulator had so shaken my nerves, that I quite dreaded to go home alone.

"So much the better," she said. "Most people are not sufficiently afraid of the personage you speak of. But I know that what you say is affectation, or rather jesting. You are not timid, and I have reason to be grateful for it. Every time that I am reminded of that narrow escape of mine, I feel that I have not thanked you sufficiently for risking your life

to save me. Just think of it! If I had been thrown, it might have killed me, or at least rendered me deformed for life. Oh, it would be dreadful, certainly, to become a cripple at a blow, or to be stricken straight into idiocy. I think that I would rather have my eyes closed forever than to see nothing aright with them,—to have them always cheated and mocked by delirium. How horrible it would be to go right out of reason into madness! Not to know my friends, not to know my father, my sister!”

I felt that a crisis had come in my life, and that I was about to utter my own destiny. I do not know what I should have said, for there were no words in my brain, but only a confused whirl and hum of emotions, such as we all have felt at moments, filling the eyes with the light of their passage and striving to utter themselves without speech. I dare believe that all the fates and fairies were listening on tiptoe for my next syllable, dying to know what it would be and what would be the answer to it. That mysterious syllable, loaded with results of gladness or disappointment, I had no chance to enunciate, for just in that moment of moments, Mrs. Van Leer sprang from her sofa and ran out to us, exclaiming, “Oh, Mr. Fitz Hugh! Oh! what was that?”

“What was *what*?” I returned, with an impatience which was natural if not justifiable.

“Oh! that noise. I’m sure I heard something up stairs. There! there it goes again! Oh! there certainly are robbers up stairs. Do go up and see what it is. No, don’t go; stay here with us.”

Something had in fact fallen in the room above; some light article of furniture, I thought, like a chair or lamp-stand. At that instant quick footfalls and a whisper of drapery fled down the stairway, and Genevieve rushed into the parlor, her Cenci-like face so pale and frightened that I hardly noticed the carelessness with which her dressing-gown folded her. Indeed, I had very little chance at first to observe anything, for the moment that she appeared I had

both arms full of Mrs. Van Leer, who gave but one shriek and made a faint of it. Carrying the absurd creature into the parlor, I laid her on a sofa, where she remained until her wits got the upper hands again.

"What is the matter, Jenny?" demanded Mrs. and Miss Westervelt together.

"I—I do—don't know," stammered poor Genevieve, whose lower jaw was not under control. "Something waked me up, and then I heard the dresses fall in our closet, and I ran down."

"Stay here," said I, checking Mrs. Westervelt and Mary, who were about to rush up stairs, I suppose after Willie. "Give me a light, and I will see who is there."

"Oh, Mr. Fitz Hugh, be careful! don't be gone long!" exclaimed one or both of the sisters.

I will not conceal the fact, that as I mounted softly to the second story I took out my pocket-knife, and, opening the large blade, slipped it into my sleeve. It was a miserable weapon, not two inches and a half long; but I grasped the handle firmly and resolved to make it do. I was not alarmed, for I am pretty stolid as regards the mysterious terrors of darkness, and, being strong in muscle, am not much troubled by that instinctive shrinking from pain which is the foundation of physical cowardice. Traversing the upper hall on tiptoe, I entered the chamber from which Genevieve had just escaped. Will any lady comprehend me and believe me when I say that the only circumstance about that room which frightened me was the impudent fact that I was in it? The mystic articles of attire which lay over chairs, the bed with its coverlet thrown back, the two pillows, one dented and the other fresh, the pair of wash-stands, the very towels even, all combined to make my heart beat horribly. There was no one in the room, and nothing suspiciously out of place, except that two chairs lay overturned at the bedside. The closet, a long, passage-like affair, only contained a couple of hat-boxes, half a hundred dresses, as it seemed

to me, hanging from hooks, and half a dozen more muddled together on the floor in one corner. Respecting their sanctity, I laid no profane hands on them, and withdrew my bachelor presence. It was not till long, long afterwards that I ever confessed to any one, how, on my way out of the room, I stooped and kissed most gently, most reverently, that undinted pillow; yes, that one and not the other. I had just performed this act of devotion when it struck me that I heard a noise in the closet; and so opening it again, I walked to the end, and investigated the afore-mentioned pile of silks, delaines, and muslins. Yes, there was a somebody hidden there, and a very small somebody too, and I had him out in an instant, kicking mildly and blubbering vigorously. It was Willie Westervelt, in his nightgown, and frightened half out of his infantile senses.

"Oh, please, please!" he begged. "Willie will be a good boy. Willie won't tell any more 'tories."

On looking at me and seeing who it was, he gave an "Oh!" of astonishment, and stopped crying, although he caught hold of my coat, as if for protection.

"What is the matter with you?" said I. "What are you here for, Willie?"

"I thought it was the devil," he replied, whimpering again. "He shan't come and take Willie. Willie won't tell any more 'tories."

"No, of course he shan't," I asserted. "Come, we'll go and see your mother and sisters. Why, Willie, you have scared them terribly. No, no, don't cry. The devil shan't have you. I'll cut his tail off if he comes here."

Willie gave a hysterical giggle, but was only half reassured by this heroic promise. I took him in my arms and walked down stairs, calling out as I descended, "Here he is; here is Master Tom Thumb, the burglar."

Mrs. Westervelt had gone, taking some back way to her child, but the two sisters rushed into the hall and burst out laughing at sight of us.

"And was that all?" asked Genevieve, her color coming back to her cheeks in a torrent.

"Yes, that was all. I found him in the closet, frightened there, I fancy, by Mrs. Treat's sermon."

Just then carriage wheels rattled up to the front gate, and loud jovial voices told that the revellers had returned. Shaking back her dishevelled hair, Genevieve snatched the candle from me with one hand, dragged Willie along with the other, and escaped up stairs as her sister and I turned into the parlor. I expected to find Mrs. Van Leer stark insensible, but she had come to, as precipitately as she had gone off. To see the energy and fluency with which she set upon the four truants, the moment they entered, one would have thought that Bob and Somerville, and Hunter, as well as her husband, had sworn to love, honor, and cherish her. The two Van Leers, naturally unpolished, and just now, well champagned, roared with laughter. Somerville was perfectly sober, perfectly bland, regretful and apologetical.

"Most certainly, Mrs. Van Leer," said he. "You are quite right. We are exceedingly to blame for staying away so late. Our single, solitary excuse is our confidence in the heroism of Mr. Fitz Hugh."

"Oh! Mr. Fitz Hugh is very well," cried Mrs. Van Leer. "Of course it was very kind in him to stay with us. If he hadn't, I should just have marched down to Mr. Treat's and spent the night there. But even Mr. Fitz Hugh is no match for a house full of burglars."

"Burglars!" roared Bob. "Oh, good Lord! you don't mean to say burglars have been here! Oh Lord! Oh Mary!"

Mary instinctively retreated before the excited youth, who was advancing upon her as if he proposed to shield her in his arms from the peril which had vanished.

"No burglar at all, Cousin Jule!" she exclaimed. "It was Willie,—nobody but Willie."

"That is so, Mrs. Van Leer," I added. "Willie is the

rogue. Mrs. Treat's lecture about the great roaring lion, seems to have given him the nightmare. He woke up, ran into his sisters' room, knocked a chair over, crept into the closet, and pulled down some dresses to hide himself. That is the whole affair."

"Oh, that Mrs. Treat!" burst forth Cousin Jule. "Oh! I wish that woman was sunk. If I saw her drowning, I wouldn't throw her a stick to save her;—I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I tell you I wouldn't—no such thing;—I'd see her drown, and glad of it. I've a great mind to slap Willie, too. What business had he to alarm the whole house! Where's Mrs. Westervelt? I want to give her a lecture about bringing up children."

The poor woman still trembled from head to foot with terror, and could hardly be held responsible for her confusion of speech. She rushed up stairs now, taking the only candle that remained in the parlor, while Mary ran on before her, forbidding her to touch Willie, or to scold him either, until she could set him a better example of courage.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Jule," laughed Henry Van Leer, as he followed heavily on his wife's track. Bob tramped after him, boisterous with wine, excitement, and stupidity; and Somerville drew me along, observing in a whisper, which I then hardly noticed, that the scene would be amusing.

When we reached the open door of the room Mrs. Westervelt was coddling and soothing Willie, who, like most children, cried vehemently at the voice of sympathy. I merely glanced within, and immediately started back, stung by serpents. Genevieve had drawn forth the dresses which the little boy had torn down from their hooks in the closet, and was shaking them out one by one, preparatory to replacing them. The one which she had in her hand at that moment was the fatal plaid silk of dead leaf-colors.

How little we know of what is passing in the thoughts of our fellow men, even when they stand so near us that their

heart-beats are almost distinguishable! Could Somerville have seen what was in my spirit just then, he would have stepped out of my reach. For one instant I contemplated evil to him; then, turning on my heel, went down stairs without a word of good-night; went away from the house without a glance backward.

No human being sinneth to himself or herself alone. Sooner or later, by some unimaginable path or other, the consequences of every guilt, however secret, however unshared, will steal upon some person innocent of it, and stab him to the soul. Nature takes a broad revenge upon wickedness, punishing not the culprit only, but parent, brother, sister, lover, friend, and even stranger. Because there had begun in that family, a dark drama, in which I had no part, and which I even hated to suspect, it had been decreed that I should suffer the blight of hope and the death of love. "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

I : ed home, locked the front door after me, and was creeping slowly up stairs in the dark, feeling as if there were not another being in the world beside myself, when I heard Ma Treat call to me from her bedroom, "Lewy, is that you?"

"Ay ay. What! awake yet?" I replied, rather impatiently, and with a vague sense of injury at being spoken to.

"Yes, Lewy. I ha'n't fetched a wink of sleep since I got home; I'm as wakeful as a starved mouse, Lewy; and all for that little creetur. I'm *so* sorry I spoke sharp to him, and fretted his little heart, and troubled Miss Mary. I'm jest like a foolish old hen, that's always trying to set on other folkses' eggs. My old father-that's-gone-to-heaven's opinion was, that it took a mighty good Christian to mind his own business; and I'm beginning to come-round to his idce. Did the poor little heart cry very long, Lewy?"

"I don't think any great harm was done, Ma Treat," said

I, not choosing, for obvious reasons, to go into particulars on the subject.

“Well, I’m *so* glad! So he quieted away, and got himself off to sleep, dear creetur, did he? The tongue can no man tame, Lewy,” she added, forgetting for once to name chapter and verse. “Now go to bed, dear, and good-night.”





CHAPTER XVI.

THE SORROWS OF HUNTER.

WAS any one noticed the tendency of scandalous stories to swarm suddenly now and then, like bees, and settle upon some astonished head, which was far from expecting such a visitation? You are quietly walking in your path of duty or pleasure; you are minding your own respectable or disrespectable business; you are paying no particular attention to the world, nor it apparently to you; when all at once you find yourself covered, blinded, perhaps stung to frenzy; not a square inch of your moral cuticle without its little winged squatter; agony piercing every spot not covered by the coat of a brave conscience. It was such a flying and multitudinous trouble as this which one day overtook my thoughtless friend, Mr. Frederick William Hunter.

The swarm, much as it astonished him, was one of his own raising. Ever since the Capers paid their visit to Seacliff, he had been haunting the mansion of the Capers. To his cousins, (as he presumptuously called Mary and Genevieve,) to all the Seacliff people, in fact, as well as to various male intimates in Rockford, he joked and bragged a great deal about the susceptibility of Miss Lottie. To Miss Lottie and others he confided some amazing lies concerning an alleged rivalry between the Westervelt sisters for his affections. He had sent forth these falsehoods one by one, in the heedlessness of distracted vanity, never expecting to hear more of

them. Busy gossips collected and hived them ; they bred together, put forth stings, buzzed, swarmed ; and all at once Mr. Hunter became sensible that he was an object of popular opprobrium. Jolly fathers looked grave at him ; coaxing mothers asked him no more to tea ; frisky daughters demurely avoided his bow ; benevolent sewing-societies ripped his character to rags. Hunter no longer found the milk of human kindness all cream, but skimmed, loppered even, and as sour as vinegar. What did people think he had done ? Some responded with one story and some with another ; but all agreed in the fearful generalities of high ! fast !! dissipated !!! Vague horrible echoes of his immoralities reached me from time to time, but nothing distinct, no interesting particulars, until one Sunday afternoon, when Ma Treat returned from "meeting" in Rockford. I saw, before she reached the gate, that something had happened to disturb the good creature. Her face was blazing red ; she walked fast and fanned herself furiously ; there was a jerk in her gait, and a snap in her elbow. I thought at first that she was waging battle with Pa Treat, and wondered at it, for I had never known them to quarrel. She sat down in the doorway, kept on fanning herself, nodded her head from moment to moment, but spake not, and seemed to be waiting for me to ask her what was the matter.

"So you had a pleasant afternoon, Ma Treat?" said I.

"Pleasant, Lewy? I guess I haven't. I feel as if I had been among the congregation of the wicked. A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips, and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue: Proverbs, seventeenth, fourth. I've heard just the biggest lies that Beelzebub ever dreamed of; lies, Lewy, fit to ruin a world,—regarded by the eye of faith; lies fit to make a person's ears burn right off. No, Lewy, I've had precious little comfort in the sanctuary this day."

"But what are they, Ma Treat? Are they amusing, these lies?"

"Well, don't you think, Lewy? they've gone and got up

stories about our young ladies up here, and that dirty, good-for-nothing little Hunter. Just as though Miss Mary, or Miss Genevieve either, would touch him with a toasting-fork! I thought at first it was some of Miss Brunson-the-dress-maker's nonsense, and I was going to give her a piece of my mind about scandal and tittle-tattle; but she said Mrs. Deacon Frisby told *her*, and all Rockford knew of it. Says I, Miss Brunson, Mrs. Deacon Frisby is a born simpleton, and all Rockford an't much better. Says I, Miss Brunson, what is it?—Says she, He makes very free with 'em.—Says I, Which of 'em?—Says she, One or both of 'em, I don't know which.—Says I, Miss Brunson, either Mrs. Frisby or all Rockford lies, one or both of 'em, I don't know which."

Ma Treat set her arms akimbo, and faced me down with as much severity as if I and Miss Brunson the dress-maker were one and the same criminal. Dropping her elbows, and resuming her fan, she continued—

"Furthermore, says I, Miss Brunson, when he begins to trouble you or Mrs. Frisby, it will be time enough for you to squall about it.—They are both fifty odd, Lewy, and as plain as horse-blocks.—She spunked up at that, and was going to slap back at me, when up comes that poor, simpering, silly Mrs. Deacon Frisby. Says I to *her*, What is this about the Miss Westervelts?—Oh, mercy on us! says she; it was all a mistake; it wasn't the Miss Westervelts that he was around; it was Lottie Capers.—There! says I, looking at Miss Brunson, there goes a basket of lies, smash!—Lewy, she just stood and choked; if she'd had her scissors, I reckon she'd stuck 'em into me. Oh, she's a tartar! but I guess she caught it there for about a quarter of an hour. Such a lecturer as I read off about governing the tongue! Well, that was only the beginning of the battle. I just had to go and take the town down. Everybody had the stories, some about Miss Mary, some about Miss Genevieve, some, and mostly, about Miss Lottie Capers, and some about they didn't know who, nor what. I talked every minute between meetings, scarcely

stopping to swallow my pie. All through the afternoon meeting too, I was thinking over the stories, and didn't hear a word of the sermon. I couldn't control my mind, Lewy, no more than if it was a cart-load of crickets."

I was puzzled and troubled by Ma Treat's narrative. Could it be that the Rockford gossips had got an inkling of the Westervelt mystery, and had only made the mistake of putting Hunter in the place of Somerville? Could it be that the little skipping-jack was himself the demon of the intrigue? Or was the whole farrago of scandal a mere mistake, hatched from some of the absurd fibs which Hunter was in the daily habit of laying?

"Do you suppose that the Rockford people have become seriously prejudiced against the Misses Westervelt?" I inquired.

"Well, not so very much, perhaps, after all, Lewy; I guess some of 'em are more prejudiced against *me*, just now; for I've given it to 'em long and strong, I tell you; here a little, and there a little more. Then, on the whole, most folks think the whole affair is one of Lottie Caperses. She's a soft, high-tighty piece, always flying about after the beaux like a hen after grasshoppers, and might do something foolish without being a bit unnatural. And then again, all the real respectable folks say it's nothing but one of that little dirty Hunter's whoppers. For a small man, he can tell the biggest lies, Lewy! Can't he, Pa Treat?"

"Real light-headed feller;—real rigajig," affirmed Pa Treat.

"And I guess that now all the stories will blow over, like a swarm of mosquitoes," continued Ma Treat. "But if I was you, Lewy, I would talk to that little Hunter, and give him a piece of your mind."

I did indeed resolve to talk to that little Hunter. He saved me the trouble of looking him up and broaching the delicate subject, by coming to my room early the next morning and opening the scandal-bag himself. He appeared

wretchedly cast down, and quite forgot his conceit for a time under the pressure of his troubles.

“My dear fellow, I wish you could help me,” said he, curling up in a chair as quietly and meekly as a sick kitten. “I’m in an awful scrape, and haven’t the least idea how I shall get out of it. Look at me!” he added impressively, at the same time throwing his long hair back from his temples. “Am I a man that you would take for a Don Juan? Do I bear the impress of a libertine nature? If so, my countenance does me the foulest injustice; for I assure you, Fitz Hugh, most solemnly and upon my sacred word of honor, that I hold such a character in perfect abomination; if I were in rags and a pickpocket, I should consider myself a finer gentleman than the most elegant Lovelace.”

“I have no doubt of it,” said L. Hunter’s vanity could not have been crushed by rags, nor a sense of infamy.

“Thank you, Fitz Hugh! I confess that my nature is susceptible and amative: I can love woman easily, earnestly, passionately; I admit it and am proud of it; but, Fitz Hugh, I always respect her. I would sooner tear my heart palpitating from my breast, than pluck a single bud from the Eden of Innocence.”

“Stop a moment, Hunter, I don’t mean to impeach your sincerity; still, I wish to observe, that these sentiments are diametrically opposite to some that I heard you put forth last week.”

“Don’t be hard on me, Fitz Hugh,” he interrupted imploringly. “I talked like a dunce.—I know it. I was carried away for a moment—but only for a moment—by the social sophistries of our witty and fascinating, but, I begin to fear, godless friend, Somerville. I was a fool, but not a knave, believe me! On the contrary, ever since I was old enough to adore female loveliness, I have—I assure you, my friend—adored female purity. I have regarded it as the fairest flower of the widespread fields of humanity,—the most priceless gem of the solemn cavern of time. Such being my real

sentiments, you can faintly imagine my indignation and disgust when I am accused of despising that flower and insulting that gem. These country gossips, these boorish tattlers around here, assert that I have attempted to lead astray from the path to Heaven one of the noblest, sweetest girls that ever made physical beauty more entrancing by adding to it the angelic pinions of moral beauty. That girl,—Lottie Capers,—is worth them all. I too, my friend, feel that I am the moral equal of any selected dozen of these babbling rustics. Yet my name has been used for a tar-brush to blacken hers. What a position for a member of the church!"

"Do you mean that Miss Capers is a church member?"

I inquired.

He blushed, hesitated, and then stammered out with a queer look, half slyness and half shame, "No :—I am, Fitz Hugh. I was received into the college church six months ago, as one of the converts of last winter's revival. Don't laugh at me. I know I'm a scabby sheep, and shouldn't have gone near the fold. But that's another unlucky scrape that I've got into and can't get out of. I was carried away by the general rush, passed a good examination before the deacons, and really thought that I had my spiritual diploma. But I couldn't keep up to the mark, and my religion for the last three months has been a perpetual flunk and fizzle. I wish to Heaven that I was comfortably excommunicated! It has all come of those cursed powows and freshman-hazings, and initiations, and burials of Euclid, and that sort of thing. They are good fun, but they are horrid stumbling-blocks to piety."

"Then why do you engage in them?" I asked.

"Why, if we don't," said he, with a curious expression which seemed to be a struggle of jest and earnest,—“if we don't, we lose our influence over our unconverted class-mates.”

"At all events, you ought not to talk like a skeptic. I have heard you do so repeatedly. I have heard you when you really seemed to think it a remarkable proof of your tol-

erance,—of your consideration for the feelings of religious people,—that you did not flatly deny the existence of a Supreme Being.”

“Oh Lord! I know it,” he groaned. “It’s all Somerville’s work, Fitz Hugh. That man is irresistibly seductive.”

“Well, well; let this pass. Don’t let us lose time over your religion. But you must set about crushing these scandalous rumors immediately. Do you know that certain people connect your name impertinently with the Misses Westervelt?”

He seemed thunderstruck, turned pale, and sat with open mouth, unresponsive.

“You must contradict all that,” I said sternly; and do it at once, before you pay attention to the nonsense concerning Miss Capers.”

“I will—I will,” he gasped, while the sweat gathered on his forehead. “But for God’s sake, Fitz Hugh, don’t mention this last affair up at Seacliff. They might think that I—that I—had been—been lying about them.”

I felt certain that he had, although as yet I possessed no positive knowledge of it.

“I’m sure I don’t know what I’ve said,” he added, dropping his brows with a pretence at recollection. “I give you my solemn word of honor that I respect the very ground they tread upon. I pledge you my sacred honor as a gentleman that I would strike that man to earth who should dare to speak ill of them. Oh Heaven! I wish I could—what *shall* I do, my dear fellow?”

“Why, behave like a man. Cleanse your own name and the names of these ladies. Go to Rockford this afternoon, and contradict the scandals and wallop the scandal-mongers. It will be easy work to clear the Misses Westervelt; nobody has dared to whisper much evil of them. As for Miss Capers,” I added maliciously, “you will, of course, marry *her*.”

“Of course, of course,” he replied eagerly. “No!” he

added in the next instant. "I can't go so far as that; can't sacrifice myself quite to that extent."

"Sacrifice yourself! I thought she was one of the noblest, sweetest girls that ever made physical beauty more entrancing by adding to it the angelic pinions of moral beauty. Isn't that sort of woman good enough for you?"

"Fitz Hugh," he replied, putting himself in one of his heroic attitudes, "I *have* loved that creature,—loved her to distraction; but the charm is gone,—my volcano is extinct."

"No matter," said I. "You are equally bound to offer yourself, and, if she accepts, (as she will, of course,) to make her the best husband you can."

"Why, the fact is,—I,—I'm not quite free," he stammered, "I am implicated with a girl in —; that is, a girl or two. Oh! no scandal, you understand; only an engagement, or something very like it."

"Hunter," said I, "you show an admirable faith in a guiding Providence. This is not the first time that I have known you to commence a story without the least idea how you would end it."

"Don't be hard on me, Fitz Hugh," he begged. "I really am engaged to somebody at —;—I'll give you my oath upon it."

"Only engaged! Then you are more bound here than there. You must break off all your college flirtations, and offer yourself instantly to Miss Capers, whom you have been the cause of injuring."

"Well! I'll do it—I must—I will!" he exclaimed, starting up and lifting his right hand as if taking an oath. "I'm bound as a gentleman and a man of honor to do it. But, Fitz Hugh, I tell you what! it will be a trial; it will be a worse job than joining the Church;—I shall regret it all my life. Come, I may as well make a clean breast and tell you the exact truth. I never did love that girl enough to marry her; never meant anything more serious than a trifling flirtation;—a week or two of amorous dalliance, innocent and

coy. And now, to be entrapped in this absurd style,—to be driven into the pitfall of matrimony by a yelping pack of village gossips,—it is enough to drive one to suicide. I tell you honestly and solemnly that I would surrender half my future to escape the gulf that I see yawning at my feet with Miss Lottie Capers at the bottom of it. She is sure to accept, you know; girls can't resist biting at a student. Why, sir, I've known one of my classmates to be engaged to three damsels in — at once; not boarding-school misses either, but young ladies in society; every one of them his senior by a couple of years or so; and he all the while making a perfect rush among the affections of a fourth. Just think of what I am losing by engaging myself to a girl who will make me stick to it or sue me. It would be just like that father of hers to sue me if I flunked."

"I am exceedingly sorry for you," said I, with an affectation of pity. "It is a miserable situation for a man of feeling and honor."

"Stop! a salvatory idea!" he exclaimed. "Fitz Hugh, I have a plan which will combine honor and happiness; which will enable me to do what a gentleman should, and yet escape Miss Capers. As I have compromised her in the opinion of this stupid public, I will submit to an engagement, and then induce her to break it by getting myself beastly drunk, and lying an hour or two in the Rockford gutters, if the miserable village has any. Make me your compliments, my dear fellow; the conception is clever and all my own. It is a desperate course, indeed; it is casting my Christian character among swine in a frightfully literal manner; but then it is a very clear case that I shall have to sacrifice something."

"Certainly, and nothing could be less valuable, it seems to me, than your Christian character; the swine can't harm it much, I fancy. Now, suppose we start immediately for Rockford. I will call with you on the Capers, and back your suit with the father. There is no other way. As your friend, I must insist upon it. Come along."

I was talking all the while in a sort of angry banter, but I looked immensely resolute and even savage, as if I were profoundly in earnest. Let no one think that I was too hard upon the mendacious little blackguard. It was right to punish him for his impertinent and mischievous falsehoods, and it was only fair to the injured Miss Lottie to give her the choice of marrying or sacking him. He drew back from my proffered arm with an air of consternation oddly mingled with shame.

"Now, look here, Fitz Hugh," he implored. "Now, what is the use of pushing a gentleman on in this desperate way. No no! I *can't* do it; there are certain reasons why I can't. Come, I'll just make a clean breast, and have done with the whole cursed thing," he added, sinking into a chair, the picture of perspiring humiliation.

"Out with it, then!" exclaimed I, drawing myself up grimly dignified. "What is the reason you can't offer yourself to Miss Capers?"

"Because I *have* offered myself, and she refused me," he stammered. "That's the truth, so help me God, Fitz Hugh, and I swear it on my sacred word of honor, I do indeed, as I am a gentleman."

He was fairly whimpering now, and looked so ridiculously ashamed of himself that I could hardly help laughing aloud.

"Incredible!" I exclaimed, pushing my hair up and glaring mock-heroics at him.

"It is positively true, I do assure you," he whined. "I put my heart and hand at her disposal a week ago, and she rejected both with a bland firmness which destroyed hope."

And since then you have been revenging yourself by promulgating lies to her discredit, I thought. The like has happened before.

"I have cause for wretchedness, you see," he continued;—"overwhelming cause, without the lash of scandal. Fitz Hugh, it seems to me that my present situation would afford abundant material for an agitating romance."

His vanity awakened at this idea, and, rising, he paraded the room, talking with a faint echo of his accustomed magniloquence. "I have done my duty; I have played the part of a man of honor; and my reward is to suffer. I believe that I have strength of soul enough to carry out the plot by going frankly to Capers, braving his unreasonable, but paternal and therefore noble rage, and swearing to him that his child is worthy of his love. This evening, my friend, let us be at Rockford and hasten the *dénouement*."

"Give me your hand, Hunter!" said I, emulating his melodrama, and biting down a smile. "That resolution does honor to you and to humanity. I am with you to the end."

He favored me with a sentimental shake, and walked away with a gait not materially less pompous than usual. After tea we borrowed the single-buggy of Henry Van Leer, and drove over to Rockford, pulling up at the ponderous pine fence which fronted Mr. Capers' showy but clapboard mansion. A booby Irish girl conducted us, unannounced, into the presence of the master of the house. He reposed as an anaconda might, his small head laying against the back of a rocking-chair, while his lank body rested on the outer edge of the seat, and his extremities stretched far away into the middle of the room. The American is the only man who knows what to do with the small of his back. He sits on it. No other nation has made this discovery.

Mr. Capers had a handkerchief over his face, which he removed at the noise of our entrance. I noticed that the expression of his long and coffin-shaped countenance was even more funereal than usual, and that his small eyes were red and moist as if he had been weeping copiously. He stared at us in a sort of stupefaction at first, and then, making a sudden spring, collared Hunter.

"Where is my daughter? Where is she, you little monster?" he shouted, shaking my scared companion as easily as a dog shakes an old hat.

"Mr. Capers!—leave go of me!" gurgled the throttled

youth. "You are choking me. Don't, sir! or I shall have to strike in self-defence. Oh, Mr. Capers!—do not force me to—to lose my respect for your gray hairs!"

While talking thus in distracted jerks, he was dangling here and there about the room, at the end of the long arm of Mr. Capers, who made the most of his time, feeling that it was short because his strength was going. After my first moment of stupefaction, I interfered, and separated the two feeble gentlemen, without any perceptible resistance. Capers subsided into his rocking-chair, and gave way to a burst of tears.

"Now, sir! what does this mean, sir?" shouted Hunter, ruffling his own feathers as he observed the drooping pinions of his antagonist. "I demand an explanation. If it were not for your reverend senility, sir, I would take bodily satisfaction."

"Where is my daughter? Bring back my daughter!" returned Capers, sobbing.

"I haven't seen your daughter. I don't know anything about your daughter," asserted Hunter.

"She disappeared this morning, sir," observed Capers in a piteous whisper, turning his tearful eyes upon me. "I hope you will pity a bereaved father's affliction. I have been robbed of my child, sir."

"I am astonished, sir; I am truly grieved," said I. "Still, I think I can assure you that Mr. Hunter has had nothing to do with her disappearance. I give you my word that he has passed the entire day at Seaclyff, and that Miss Capers has not been seen nor heard of there."

"My friend Mr. Fitz Hugh is quite right, sir; I can vouch for his perfect veracity in this respect, sir," put in Hunter. "As a gentleman, Mr. Capers, and as a man of honor, I declare that I know nothing of this disappearance of your daughter—nothing of its cause—nothing, sir, of its nature. I called this evening solely to offer you my sympathies and my assistance."

This closing assertion was of course a fib, but I did not think it worth while to contradict it.

"In that case, Mr. Hunter, I ought to apologize for my violence," said our afflicted friend. "I do apologize. I beg your pardon. I trust you will excuse a man whose brain is shaken by such a calamity."

"Mr. Capers, I forgive you with all my heart," returned Hunter solemnly. "Think no more of it. Your character is still venerable to me. I admire your piety and respect your pugnacity. More than that, I pity your misfortune. What can I do for you, sir? My whole manhood, bodily and spiritual, is at your service."

"She disappeared this morning, sir," repeated Capers, looking at me and speaking in the slow, meek monotone which was peculiar to him. "We have not found a trace of her. I went to her mother's grave, thinking that she might be there, decking it as usual with flowers. I had the whole town searched,—sent telegraphs everywhere. No one had heard of her. At last I found a letter in her room, directed to me. It stated that she preferred to marry without my consent, rather than die of a broken heart with it. I don't know who she has gone to marry, sir. Several persons wanted her. She was very attractive to gentlemen, sir; she was like her mother in that respect,—though not so handsome. When I saw Mr. Hunter, I thought that perhaps he had carried her off. That was the reason I ran at you, Mr. Hunter. I beg your pardon, sir. I know that you sympathize with me. I know that you appreciated her. I thank you for it."

"Mr. Capers—say no more about it," exclaimed Hunter in a quavering voice. "I appreciated—I adored her. If I could find the man who has taken advantage of her youth and confiding innocence, I would be his Nemesis,—I would destroy him, sir."

"I thank you, sir," replied Capers, mildly. "Your intentions are good. But perhaps you had better not destroy him,

sir. It might pain my daughter. Come, let us go to her mother; let us visit the faithful departed. I was about to start for the burying-ground when you came. Shall we go, gentlemen?"

"With mournful pleasure, Mr. Capers," responded Hunter, earnestly. "There is something solemnizing, restraining, and sanctifying in the churchyard. Standing by the graves of our friends, death seems near, eternity awful, and the promises precious."

He started and glanced sidewise at me, seeming to hope that I had not heard him. For one moment the burnt-out passion of the last revival had flickered up in the poor contemptible backslider's heart, and he had repeated half-unconsciously one of his old pious exhortations, as a drunkard on the morning after his debauch will drowsily hum the chorus of a drinking-song. So ashamed was he of this momentary effervescence of devout feeling, that, when he met my eye, he absolutely gave a faint wink, as if to assure me that he was merely quizzing Capers. But the effort at deceit and bravado was ineffectual, and for one instant his countenance was a crimson mass of humiliation.

A walk of five minutes brought us to the ancient cemetery of Rockford. Two hundred years ago the Puritan founders of the town had selected this sterile stretch of gravelly earth as a very poor bit for tillage, and therefore an economical and safe asylum for their honored dead. The solemn husbandry of the sexton had made barrenness fertile, and clothed the spot with a denser, darker verdure than any of the fields about it. Long and vigorous were the grasses, multitudinous and bright the wild flowers, which had their roots in the graves, and drew their life from the death below. Wonderful, terrible, and beautiful is the chemistry of the churchyard. Men who, while they walked the earth, were hard, cold, unsympathizing, unpoetic, become changed in nature when they are laid under earth, and begin shortly to spring up in tender turf, to bloom forth in sweet-breathed

roses and violets. They rejoice in the rains of spring; they bow gratefully before the winds of summer. They are more humble and gentle than they were once haughty and cynical. Formerly they had not a thought nor an emotion for the beauty of nature, and now they are transformed into a portion of that beauty. Really, when I look upon certain of my fellow creatures, persons of the baser sort, grovelling, deformed and despicable natures, it sometimes seems to me that it will be a species of promotion for them, a higher grade of development, when they are metamorphosed into graveyard thistles and mullens. A man had better be grass for an undertaker's horse than tread the earth but to stamp it with violence and pollution.

Mr. Capers and Hunter walked straight toward a part of the cemetery chiefly devoted to the moderns, as was shown by a fashionable congregation of marble pillars and obelisks which gleamed whitely through the dusk of evening. I lingered here and there, to pull the moss from the face of some half-sunken brown headstone, and to spell out the by-gone virtues of the venerable sleeper below. A man must needs study epitaphs to get an idea of the moral decadence of the human race in his own generation. I believe that I am not at all uncharitable toward my personal friends and acquaintance, when I declare that no such spotless and attractive people exist now as have mouldered away in our ancient churchyards, if headstones may be trusted. What a shining catalogue of saints might be gathered from those eulogistic tablets! What a pity that we have only such brief and dry biographies of creatures so elevated and exemplary, whose whiteness of soul should have been perpetuated by both statuary and stationery, and who doubtless were not because God took them! Or is it possible that these sermons in stones are too good to be true, and that the carver made noble what the Creator but made tolerable? Let us imagine a modest ghost,—who has been pacing the churchyard penitently all night, or doing some spiritual deed of

comfort in the neighborhood,—returning to his grave in the morning and glancing at the inscription before he glides again under the stone. “A good husband,” he reads, and says, “Ah! but I was often harsh and bitter.”

“A faithful father,” he continues, and begins to doubt whether he is not at the wrong slab.

“A most exemplary Christian,” the sentence concludes. Here he holds up both his hands with amazement, exclaiming, “Alas! either men have lied concerning me, or this is not my place.”

It is doubtless a hard thing to compose an epitaph. First, you must satisfy the friends of the incomparable deceased, and then you must satisfy the carping public, and lastly, you would like to satisfy yourself. Harder still would the task be if we had to consult and content the dead; and that, not because he would be vain, but because he would be humble and truthful. I never find one of these vaunting headstones defaced, but what I suspect that the ghost did it.

If ever a departed spirit had reason to obliterate its own epitaph for very shame at its fulsome panegyric, it was the spirit of the lamented Mrs. Capers. Such a list of virtues, such a catechism full of excellences, as the bereaved husband read to us from the superb glistening obelisk! It was like the epitaphs which will be written during the millennium.

“I got that up myself, with the help of my sister and our good minister,” said he. “I only left out one important point of her character. She was remarkable tasty in dress, sir; but somehow I couldn’t bring that in nicely. I was very sorry, sir, for it was one of the chief things in her; but perhaps, on the whole, it wasn’t a proper idea for a graveyard. Oh, sir! that lady was a treasure to me. I never appreciated her properly until she left me. Nor I never quite knew how much I lost in her, until to-day, that my daughter quit me so mysteriously. If Mrs. Capers had lived, she would have guided Lottie, and Lottie would have been here this minute, instead of wandering far away from the tomb

THE SORROWS OF HUNTER.

where her mother's form and her father's heart are buried together."

There was a sincerity of emotion, a pathos of single-heartedness about this very singular man; which occasionally almost hid his simplicities and eccentricities, as the flowers of a plant will sometimes overbloom and half cover its leaves. I could not help reverencing him at that moment, and instinctively removed my hat in a sudden start of sympathy.

"Yes, my wife! our Lottie ought to be here!" he repeated in a louder tone.

"She is here papa," whispered a girlish voice behind us; and then came a rush of female vesture, a sob, and a scream. There was the runaway Lottie hanging on her father's neck, kissing him and crying in his shirt-bosom.

"My child! my child!" shouted Capers, grappling her round the waist, and sticking his head over her shoulder, after the fashion of stage-fathers.

"I have returned; pardon me, papa," whimpered the young lady, while her eyelids dripped like eaves upon the paternal linen.

"You shall leave me no more;—I forgive all," cried the father.

It was perfectly sentimental, and melodramatic. Nothing was wanting in place, time, action, words, voice, or gesture, to heighten the delusion, and make me believe that I was surveying the closing scene, the agonizing *dénouement*, of a popular play in some third rate-theatre. Precisely the same thing, done on the boards, would have tapped the lachrymal glands of a thousand industrious, unromantic, commonplace people. Poor novelists and playwrights are perpetually caricaturing real life, with a faith in human stupidity which pays us no compliment; but here real life, in the hands of two simpletons, was absolutely made to caricature the work of poor novelists and playwrights. That nothing might lack to the romance of the occasion, an unexpected recognition took

and I had just restored my hat to its astonished head, and

backed off a yard or two from the whirlwind of emotion which was raging beside me, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and some one behind me said, "How are you, Fitz Hugh? Ain't you going to speak to me?"

The voice was familiar, notwithstanding a tremble in it, and helped me to recognize the faintly starlit form and face of Barker, the friend with whom I had dined on the day I first saw Seaclyff.

"Why, Barker! how do you find yourself?" returned I. "What brings you here?"

"I have the honor of being the husband of that lady," he whispered, in a sort of sob of anxiety.

"Oh! I see. Well, now is your time; fall on your knees. I'll make away with myself. See you to-morrow when all is happily settled."

Seizing Hunter, who had stood in a staring trance ever since the sudden appearance of the runaway, I gently dragged him out of the yard, so as to leave the family at full liberty to arrange its dislocated affairs. He was perfectly submissive, walked like other people instead of skipping, and made no disturbance beyond a little mild moaning.

"Oh! what a moment!" he murmured, when we had reached the high-road. "Ah, Fitz Hugh! one such experience is enough for a man's life. I *supposed* that I had lost a noble woman; but I see that I have let slip a seraph."

I could hardly help laughing at the ninny. He really thought that the melodramatic scene which we had just witnessed was full of the highest earnestness and the purest pathos. To me the only wonder was, how a grave, serious fellow like Barker, a man not brilliant, but uncommonly sincere and practical, could have been caught by such a sentimental little goose as Miss Lottie. However, many a sensible man before him has saved up all his weakness for his choice of a wife.

The rest of the evening was spent in contradicting whatever rumors may have existed to the injury of the Misses

Westervelt. It was nauseous work for Hunter to go from crony to crony, eating his own words, but he did it faithfully this minor trial being much lightened perhaps by the remembrance of the gigantic bereavement which had just overwhelmed him. "Why, old feller," was the usual reply of his gossips, a smile of friendly contempt meanwhile spreading over their faces,—“why, old feller, I never believed it knew it was one of your stories;—girls like them ain't going to stand your kissing.”

It was quite characteristic of Hunter that he soon began to plume himself on the disappointments and humiliations of this memorable evening. He thought that they made him an interesting personage, a very hero of the furnace of affliction fit to excite the wildest wonder and affection of woman. Vanity is the most deceptive and derisive of practical jokers leading its multitudinous victims to flaunt their follies and misfortunes, their short-comings and vices, their every peculiarity in short, however witless and unimportant, before the eyes of a grinning world. How many a man among us has boasted himself as being somebody because he differed from certain other men in a thing of no consequence; because, for instance, he hated pancakes, or turtle soup, or some other dish which the generality of us have agreed to admire. While we laugh at Hunter, therefore, tricked out as he is with conceit, let us not forget that other and more enlightened satisfaction of laughing at ourselves.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERY A TORMENT.

SEVERAL days had elapsed since I beheld in the hands of Genevieve that abominable plaid which haunted Seaciff in such phantom fashion, disturbing whenever it met me as much as a ghost might have done, and reflected a great deal and very sadly on the probability that she was the "guilty woman" of the mystery, and I at last resolved that her error, no matter what it might be, should not destroy nor even diminish my esteem for my sister. I was saying just this to myself, one morning, as I walked soberly up to Seaciff. Entering the veranda, I met Mary Westervelt dressed in that very silk, that hateful mixture of dead-leaf colors, which had become to my mind an emblem of some unspeakable sin or calamity. The first shock of that revelation, or what I took to be a revelation, was woful. It seemed as if all that my heart loved and all powers of loving had suddenly become corruption; as if the object of my passionate respect and the respect itself, the idol and the idolater, fell dead corpses together. The only words which I uttered were, "It is you, then!" It was not to her presence there before me that I referred; it was to that every-day circumstance, now become suddenly significant; but to that other, which just then opened like a door diverse upon me; to the thought that now *she* must be the object of my anxieties and my suspicions. Earnest and even

most painful as the meaning of that short sentence was to me, I spoke it with far more calmness than I have sometimes been able to speak when my heart was full of hope and anxious to utter itself in the kindest, lovingest words that the human soul conceives. I was petrified by the death-like power and completeness of the calamity, and resigned myself to it with that nerveless, abject submission which a culprit yields to his executioner. I know that I did not start, and I believe that there was no violent nor very unusual expression on my countenance. Men receive such things differently, according to their natures, rather than according to the nature of the case.

“Yes, it is I,” she replied; “that is, I feel as sure as usual of my identity.”

She gave a glance at my abstracted, settled face, and colored a little. Perhaps she thought that I was about to resume that sentimental conversation, which Master Willie's nightmare had interrupted a week before, and push it to its natural conclusion. She uttered presently some other remark, which struck on my hearing, but made no impression on my mind, so that, if I understood it, I forgot it in the same second. At that moment a person called to her from the library. I did not then notice at all whose voice it was, although a while afterwards, perhaps an hour, it suddenly occurred to me with perfect distinctness that it was her father's. She asked me to walk into the parlor, and when I replied, very tranquilly, that I thanked her but preferred to stay in the veranda, she begged to be excused and left me.

I sat down and sank into such a reverie as a man has when he is recovering from a fever; when his mind is faint and it is occupation enough to watch the flies or count the spots on the wall. Such a misfortune as I could not have conceived the day before, without shuddering at myself for the thought, had fallen upon me; and yet I could not be astonished at it, could not call up resolution to deny it, could not even rage at

it, but lay calmly paralyzed. While I supposed that Genevieve was the "guilty woman," I had raved by myself; but not so now, because a far deeper and more poisoned hurt than that had pierced me. A man whose teeth have been shattered, or whose hand is lacerated, may suffer anguish; but he whose every limb is broken and whose entire body is mangled, lies in an almost painless calm; and as it is with this last, so is it with him whose soul is suddenly bruised by some gigantic affliction. Furthermore, it is certain that every serious wound, physical or spiritual, inflicts less pain at the moment of reception than during countless moments of equal duration for long afterward. I was now in this first stage of suffering, when the lifeblood flows away, but when there are no writhings of anguish. Not yet could fever set in, and inflammation, and that slowly-torturing struggle, between the powers of vitality on one side and the strength of the evil on the other, which must be fought through before health can be won again. To the mind, as well as to the body, it is the cure which is the most painful, and not the blow. I do not wish to convey the impression that I made all these reflections, or any of them, at that time. I did not philosophize; but I felt deeply and memorably.

After a while I thought that I heard the quick, quiet feet of Miss Westervelt returning. I started up, hurried down the steps, turned the corner of the house, and slunk away among the closest thickets and arbors of the garden. Strange as it may seem to the uninitiated in such mysteries, I dreaded to look her in the face as much as if I were the culprit and she the accuser.

What romantic boy has not imagined himself the hero of some such position as mine was then? How often in my teens had I pictured myself as loving some girl who would not accept of me, and whom the finger of a retributive justice had suddenly unveiled to me, and perhaps to the world, as totally unworthy of love or respect! Oh! I had fairly revelled in the contempt with which I would treat such a dishonored

creature; had thought of myself as petrifying her with an eye of scorn, rejecting her worthless heart now that she humbly sought to lay it at my feet, and retaining her in my memory only as the Philistines brought Samson into their temple, for an object of hate and derision. Well, the reality or something like the reality of that delightful dream had come at last, and how had it found me? Shrinking behind a clump of lilacs, weak, abject, purposeless, and looking the image of shame-faced guilt.

I was still pacing up and down across the shadow of a bush, which, as I remember, gave me just three steps either way, when Mr. Westervelt came hastily down the walk and saluted me. He quite puzzled me with his ceremonious greeting and his inquiries after my health; for at first I did not remember that he had been absent from Seacott, and that he must have returned to it that very morning. He took my arm and drew me on into a more extended promenade. I noticed presently that he was talking, and I wished to myself that he would stop his noise; but I retain no more recollection of his words than of what tune the garden birds then whistled. After a while he suddenly awakened my attention by pronouncing the name of his eldest daughter. Then, all at once, I listened eagerly, stepping as it were into the midst of his conversation, so that it necessarily seemed to me that he had entered on his subject with singular abruptness. He spoke in his usual hesitating, uncertain, almost stammering manner, drawing close to me all the while, but rarely looking me in the eye. "I naturally want to see her—and, in fact, both of them—settled," were the first words fully comprehensible to me. "My constitution is not vigorous, and the—the course of nature generally carries off the parent first, so that my feeling on the subject is—is natural. Ha? don't you think so?"

"Of course; quite so," said I, wondering what he was at and why he talked to me about getting Miss Westervelt settled.

"I suppose," he continued, "that you can see how she has

been—been educated. Disadvantageously, I am afraid—disadvantageously;—that is, in a certain way—excellently in most respects. Poor girls, brought up rich,—that is the misery of our times, sir, particularly here in America. Poor girls, brought up rich,—yes, sir. Well, what's the result? ha ha" (feeble laughter). "The result is a rich husband, or domestic unhappiness. Ha? quite right, am I not? Exactly so. A poor girl brought up rich must have a rich husband or be wretched."

"Quite right; exactly so," I repeated after him, as stolidly as Johnny Treat recited his catechism. He was dreadfully embarrassed with his subject, and got along very slowly and lumberingly, unaided as he was by questions or pertinent replies from his stupefied companion.

"I suppose you think it rather singular," he resumed, after hemming and hawing for half a minute;—"I suppose it must appear quite strange to you, sir, that you should be admitted—or rather that I should force you to become a confidant in the affairs and prospects of my family. But the truth is that we are under such—hem—obligations to you for the life, perhaps, of our eldest daughter, that we feel bound not to conceal from you anything of—hem—of particular importance. It is not important, I am aware, to you, ha ha" (some feeble attempt at laughter). "Of course not; but quite so to us, you see; quite so."

"O yes," said I, staring vacantly at the irregular bridge of his thin Roman nose; "quite so; of course."

Why was he making these disclosures to me? Did he suspect that I stood in the way of his plan for a marriage between Miss Westervelt and the ready-moneyed Robert, and was he warning me off from ground that for financial reasons he wished another to occupy? I began to comprehend that some such purpose was driving him onward through this painful wilderness of stammering.

"Just so," he prosecuted. "My daughter has—hem—I should rather say that Robert has—but doubtless you have

perceived it?—has become interested in her, and, in short, I have reason to suppose, has offered himself to her.” (He spoke rapidly now, as if anxious to hurry over a debatable point.) “And Mary, I understand, may be considered as having shown herself agreeable to the—the young man.” (Perhaps he did not dare to say, to the engagement.) “You will excuse me, Mr. Fitz Hugh, for babbling to you in this childish style. I beg your pardon sincerely for troubling you with an affair so—so entirely unimportant to you. But, really, your past kindness gives me a sort of excuse for taking up your time—for boring you, in short, with our trivial secrets. You have risked life and limb—in a measure—to save the life of my daughter; and that must be my apology for dragging you as it were into the sympathies of my family. Apropos of this subject, allow me to thank you again, most heartily, for the good service you did us. But for you, sir,—hem—I might not have had a daughter Mary at this moment. You will always have a place in our memories, and a place at our table sir.”

“It is of no consequence, Sir,” said I, as vaguely and helplessly as Mr. Toots himself.

“You, I hope, think well of Robert,—ha?” he continued, without noticing the drift of my observation.

“Quite so; oh, certainly,” I mumbled. “A very good match; very good, indeed.”

“I am glad you think so,” he replied cheerfully. “Your favorable opinion gives me a great deal of satisfaction. You are a keen observer of character, I am aware;—I noticed that in your book, sir, with many other marks of talent;—and, in short, I am delighted that you estimate Robert so highly. I confess, frankly, that it would have been difficult for me to suit myself more thoroughly in choosing a guardian for my daughter. As I was just observing to you, a poor girl brought up rich needs a rich husband; and Robert has abundance—two hundred thousand at least—not to speak of windfalls in the future. All safe too; not a dollar at risk;

no fancy stocks and no kites up. You can't imagine—not being a father, sir—what a gratification it is to me to look forward to putting my child's happiness on such a stable basis, especially in these times, when business is in such a terrible state, and I, for one, hardly know which way to turn to face my liabilities. Even if I did not admire Robert so much for his truly worthy character, I think I should consent to the match for the sake of his eminently solid prospects."

"You are very right, sir," said I; "you have shown excellent judgment." I spoke up vigorously at last, for his conversation had got to be annoying, and I was determined to have done with it. Of what consequence to me now was it whom she married and why she married him? "You have made an admirable choice for Miss Westervelt; or rather, she has made an admirable choice for herself." I was a little bitter in tone here, for after all, I felt indignant at the match. "I congratulate her, and Mr. Van Leer also."

"Very good! very kind of you!" he exclaimed with a look of real pleasure and gratitude. "I thank you sincerely, sir. I hoped you would be—be pleased; and I am glad, very glad, to hear you say so."

"And now, if you will excuse me," said I, withdrawing my arm from his,—“I have some business to attend to which will busy me during the entire day. I must bid you good morning.”

"Not for the entire day!" he replied. "Oh no! You promised, I understand, to go out fishing with us this afternoon. You must dine with us. Come, I insist upon it—I do indeed, my dear sir! my dear Mr. Fitz Hugh!"

Perhaps he suspected or believed that his disclosure had pained me deeply, and felt that he ought to heal my wounded heart by pouring the balm of hospitality into my stomach. I resisted his invitations vigorously, but I could only escape the dinner by swallowing the excursion. Getting away from him at last, I hurried down a walk and came plump upon Mrs. Van Leer, who was sitting in ambush on a bench in

one of the grape arbors, and who laughed at my grim bow, while her black eyes lighted up with gay malice.

"Ah! and has papa given his consent?" she asked. "Of course he has, if dear Mary is willing. "Oh! you are quite right to look serious over it. Matrimony is a solemn affair."

"Nonsense!" I replied, bluntly, and almost ferociously. "I have asked nobody's consent, and I am not serious. Matrimony may be a solemn affair, but that concerns you and not me."

"Oh! You relieve me immensely. I was beginning to be horribly jealous."

"I should think your husband would be," I retorted with awkward viciousness, as I cleared the garden fence and ran down the hill.

I heard her laugh in reply; but out of sight, she was out of mind. I reached home, stole unnoticed to my room, locked the door, and paced up and down for I do not know how long between the wall and the window. The wound in my heart had done with its first bleeding, and already the inflammation born from it was kindling mind and body into fever. I fretted and fumed in whispers, buried my hot head in my hands, buried it in my pillow, flung myself at full length on the floor, started up to recommence my wearisome march, and then fell again to grovel like an idiot. I never suspected before, and I would not have believed, that I could be transported to such excesses of angry unreason. There was, however, something characteristic in the paroxysm, for although I have the name of being gay and good-natured in ordinary social intercourse, yet am I disposed to become obstinate, reckless, and, I am afraid, almost brutal, under provocation.

After a long while, exhausted with this mute raving, I sat down and tried to think; but at first every reflective power seemed to have been drowned in that sea of wild blood which had surged through my being. The only idea which I could realize distinctly was that Miss Westervelt was now lost to me utterly, and that it mattered little whether it were through

the mysterious influence of Somerville or through the engagement with Robert Van Leer. Meantime, what folly, what wrong, did I accuse her of? Of no one thing distinctly, but rather of a chaos of errors, which wearied me with their contradictions and absurdities. It is the greatest shame of my life, I think, that during that first hour of darkness, I suffered myself to believe, though faintly and sorrowfully, that I had proofs enough to affirm her guilty of some transgression, ambiguous in nature, but certainly unworthy. It is not thus hastily that we ought to judge the life result of one who has borne unchallenged a spotless name. Robert Van Leer, with his slow brain and steadfast heart, would not have been that wavering, doubtful friend to Miss Westervelt that I showed myself to be when the shadow of the Seaclyff mystery seemed to fall upon her.

But after that I drifted into a gentler current of feeling, and caught sight of a shore to the horror, which bloomed with some promise of innocence. Miss Westervelt was the lady of the mystery; and *therefore* the mystery could not be a guilty one. Through the mist of suspicion, across the rush and surge of passion, I stretched out my hands to this *therefore*, and held fast by it with such a struggle of faith as that which saves a soul. I acknowledged that she was intimate with a bad man; that she was under his influence, and perhaps partly in his power; but what the secret of that influence was, I would not even try to guess. It cannot be! it cannot be! I kept repeating to the hateful suggestions which climbed to my ear in spite of me, whispering as the unbodied voices of fiends whispered to Christian when he walked through the shadowy valley. Nevertheless, I instantly added, it is better that she should be married to Robert, and married soon, because it will tend to save her from any net of devilish entanglement which may have been laid for her ruin.

Presently I had a summons to dinner. Like all the plain country people of New England, Ma and Pa Treat dined

at exactly twelve o'clock. Dinner in civilized society is always more or less of a ceremony; and every social ceremony has, if not a calming, at least a repressive influence upon emotion; so that, although I did not eat much and talked in monosyllables, I rose from the table a more rational creature than I sat down to it. Thankful for this wiser frame of spirit, I made the most of it by devising a style of conduct and conversation which should govern my future intercourse with Miss Westervelt. Perhaps one might learn something good from even Lucifer; and certainly I profited on this occasion by the manners of Somerville. No sullenness, no hard looks, no innuendoes! I said; but rather, a calmer brow, a gentler eye, a more polished speech than usual; a mask of impenetrable courtesy for all my suspicions and grief and anger. Such would I be while I continued near her; and the trial would not be hard, because it would not be long. But I could not take flight instantly, I added: no, that would look too capricious and unaccountable, or it might be interpreted to my disadvantage and to that of others; it might lead to whispers that I had been rejected, that I had taken offence at trifles, &c. Oh, yes, I found plenty of good reasons for not quitting the neighborhood of Seacliff immediately.

Notwithstanding my sage reflections and resolutions, I felt when I set out for the Westervelt house that my composure tottered. Usually I ran up the little hill with ease; but now it took away my breath, although I walked as slowly as to a funeral; and at the summit I actually muttered a few meaningless words to myself, merely to see if my voice remained to me. It was a relief as I entered the veranda to hear loud conversation within, for I felt that I could confront half a dozen easier than one. And yet I was not a criminal; the secret that shook me was another's. I suffered because I was a human being; a dog in my place would have been happy enough.

They were all ready, and waiting for me. Henry Van

Leer, an unlighted cigar in his mouth, was gesturing violently with his broad-brimmed hat as he harangued concerning the necessity of strict discipline, quiet and silence while on the fishing-grounds. "I tell you I can't have so much chattering and trotting about, and fussing at the lines as we had before, and I won't have it, and so all you women take notice and keep quiet, and let the lines alone."

"Oh, stop your noise, Hen—ry!" retorted his wife. "I can't hear myself talk. You needn't hector us, if you do speak bass. You don't suppose we are going to lose our fun mere—ly to catch a few ugly sharks, do you?"

"Why, that's the fun," shouted Henry. "Why, good Lord! you don't know what you're talking about!"

"Dear me, what a roar, Henry! I think you had better take the first shark's skin and polish down your voice. They say it's better than sand-paper."

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Jule," he replied, nodding with a good-humored grin, his usual demeanor under her repartees.

Meanwhile I stood on one side, glad that no one addressed me. I tried to control my eyes, but the traitors wandered to and fro until they encountered the eyes of Miss Westervelt. She too, it seemed to me, was endeavoring to withhold or withdraw a look of timid inquiry, and to suppress an expression of kind yet pained surprise, which made her face almost reproachful. Her gaze dropped instantly before mine, then rose with a start to the heavy visage of Robert Van Leer, and then turned in assumed vacancy to an open window. Her father has told her all, and perhaps more than all, I said to myself; he has told her that I am willing to see her married to another. In my turn I looked at Robert, wondering whether he had finally triumphed in his suit, and dreading to see the happy pride of an accepted lover emblazoned on his osken countenance. Considering how completely I had given up Miss Westervelt, my relief at discovering no such expression in him was somewhat absurd and uncharitable.

In a few minutes we were on board the little yacht *Falcon*. She was a centre-board sloop of thirty tons burden, broad in the beam, with a long and sharp run forward, a short one aft, a wide stern, a very flat floor, and a draught of about three feet at the rudder. Her hull was perfectly white, with the exception of a narrow black streak just below the bulwarks. Her spread of canvas was prodigious for her tonnage, and with a light breeze she made twelve knots an hour. Rough water knocked her about like an egg-shell; but she was just the thing for skimming Long Island Sound.

In those days I had a fancy for a yacht, just proportioned to my inability to keep one. The elastic stride of a fine horse is not more exhilarating to me than the breezy bound and foaming dip of a fast little vessel, flying, now seaward, now landward, under a wind fragrant with freshness from the cool meadows of ocean. I often spent an idle day (one of those days when the brain declines to go into harness) in modelling a miniature clipper for some of my youthful acquaintance, and in watching its nautical triumphs over rival toys on some rippling ocean, which, in my commonplace moments, I called a pond or puddle. Those hours of play were as full of pleasure and poetry as those other hours when I was building a fairy tale or launching a ballad.

This afternoon not even the reality of yachting could divert me. The excursion was the more painful because I had expected to find a few moments of rich and strange happiness in it, and felt now that those moments might never be. I had meant to be near Miss Westervelt, to support her steps across the wavering deck, to feel her weight resting on me, no burden, and to whisper, perhaps, in her ear some of those words that men rarely utter for the first time but in whispers. Now I could only murmur to myself that saddest of sad lines, "It might have been."

Spreading her canvas, the light bark skated like a water insect over the ripples of the cove, and dashed out among the wavelets of the Sound. The helm was in the hand

of Pa Treat, who usually piloted in case of a family excursion. Miss Westervelt sat behind him alone, leaning over the low taffrail, and apparently lost in watching the foam whirls which spun out rapidly astern, unwinding themselves to naught across the hazy green water. The two Van Leer men lounged amidships, overhauling the lines occasionally, and speculating on our fishing prospects with a solemn earnestness which seemed to me, of course, contemptibly misplaced and ridiculous. Somerville lounged against the starboard bulwark, talking to Mrs. Westervelt and Mrs. Van Leer. Mr. Westervelt took short turns up and down the tiny quarter-deck with Genevieve, and seemed to be remonstrating timidly against some outbreak of her characteristic pettishness, while the girl continued to make quick replies, shake her head strenuously, and fling angry glances in the direction of the group at the starboard bulwark. All at once it struck me, not perhaps for the first time, but now first with distinctness and vividness, that this ill-humor, this feminine savageness, which I had long seen and disliked in her, had for its object, not Mrs. Westervelt, but Somerville. The hiss and ripple of waters prevented me from catching what she said; but several times I saw her lips formed as if to syllable his name. Had I at last hit upon the true secret of her petulance? Was it that she hated Somerville, and hated him for good cause? I watched her with great interest now, as she fumed away after her defiant fashion, while her father tried in vain to hush her, patting her hand with his, and looking over his cringing shoulders at every turn.

"Come, Mr. Fitz Hugh, you must be my pirate,—my particular buccaneer," said Cousin Jule, leaving her party, and coming to take my arm. Obeying her impulsion, I led her forward to the forecastle, where we leaned over the bulwark and watched the sharp prow drive through the faintly creaming waters. She commenced her usual coquetries; asking me how I would like to be a corsair, and carry off women; whether I would pick out rich victims, or consult taste merely, and se-

lect handsome ones ; whether I would think *her* worth a battle and a voyage to the Isle of Pines ; declaring that she should perfectly delight in such an adventure, and so on. But something presently occurred which made romance shrink away and hide itself. As we passed the point, and the breeze freshened, her chatter suddenly ceased, and she became so significantly white about the mouth, that I offered my arm and took her aft, without waiting for explanations. She did not speak to me as she tottered along, but called out in a most deplorable whimper, "Hen—ry ! Hen—ry !" It was just like her ; whenever she was in trouble she ran to her husband ; when the trouble vanished, she was ready to trifle with the first male coquette that happened along.

"Why, what's the matter, Jule ?" returned Henry. "Sick ? Good Lord, no ! Don't give it up so. Keep a stiff upper lip, Jule."

"Oh, Hen—ry ! Hen—ry !" moaned Jule. "Oh ! I'm going to be *so* sick. Do lay me down somewhere. Do throw me overboard. Oh ! I wish the yacht was sunk."

He carried her to the quarter-deck, spread a plaid for her, covered her feet with his own coat, and then hurried off to mix a glass of brandy and water, which he asserted would help her to keep a stiff upper lip. Recumbent, quiescent, but not patient, Mrs. Van Leer endured the remainder of the excursion.

As for me, I enjoyed it as much perhaps as did the sharks that we took ashore. I had indeed this pleasure which they had not, that I could torment something, and thus feel that I was imperfectly revenging on nature, after a roundabout, senseless fashion, the pain which I myself suffered. In general I despise fishing ; but this afternoon I fished perseveringly, strenuously ; partly for the blind zest of destruction, and partly to escape reflection. Two or three times I had to bait Miss Westervelt's hook, and to heave or to haul in her line for her. She always thanked me for these little services, and I always bowed smilingly in reply ; but there was a feeling

of alienation, of unutterable remoteness, between us, which would not permit of conversation. Her usual frank cordiality of manner was gone, and her voice, though still sweet, was repressed and monotoned. I have sometimes had a dream which was like the suffering of that afternoon. I have seemed to be standing on one side of a narrow but bottomless cleft, holding the hand of a dear friend who stood on the opposite brink, each of us trying to draw closer to the other, while the chasm steadily widened between us, overcoming our struggles, tearing us apart, and then sweeping us away and away on either hand until we could see each other no more, hear each other's cries no more forever.

Then too, while this woful disjunction increased momentarily until even love and hope could not span it, it was an additional pain to behold Somerville smiling and talking by her side, in the place which I had lost. He never appeared to me more graceful, more fascinating, than he did this day whenever he approached Miss Westervelt. Out of the depths of my own turmoil and discord, I felt that his manner was all delicacy and his words all music; and yet I believed that he was wicked, that he was pitiless, that he was without honor, that his pulse was even then beating with villainous passions. He seemed to me like some beautiful wild beast which had taught itself to repress for a time all expression of its native savageness, in order that it might do the greater harm. They say that a leopard will steal into an encampment by night with such a noiseless tread, that not a sleeper is disturbed, and even waking men do not hear the murderous footstep as it creeps behind them through the shadows. In the morning the prints of the claws are found, or some one lies stark and dead, his throat torn open and his life-blood sucked away. This is all; no one overheard the agony; no one knows when it happened. And all the while that the animal was accomplishing his deed of carnage, his motions were exquisitely graceful, his spotted hide glossy with health, and his whole being an incarnation of physical beauty. Such is Somerville, I thought, in our little circle:

no foot is so silken as his, no port so elegant, no manner less alarming; and yet he is draining the life from a soul.

Coming back from the fishing-grounds, the conversation was general and lively, as is usually the case among people excited by exercise and adventure. Even Mrs. Westervelt lost that languor and seeming of melancholy which often marked her, and chattered gayly, or rather hoydenishly, as was her wont when she did chatter.

"Well, this *is* fun," said she. "Who would think that these ugly, dirty fish could amuse one so! Why, it's like catching beaux; it's almost as good as flirting, isn't it, Jule? Oh, Jule! Jule! you and I have done a great deal of that, I am afraid. If our husbands knew the whole, Jule, what would they say to us?"

"Say? why, just what they did say, that they are our devoted admirers and slaves," replies Mrs. Van Leer, who was in smooth water again.

"Only hear how saucy she is, my dear!" continues Mrs. Westervelt. "Do you agree to what she says? But I did catch you, my dear, didn't I? Ha ha ha. It's a pity that a woman can't marry all her adorers. How many weddings should we have had between us, Jule, in that case? I will count up my list, if you will count up yours. No, no, on second thoughts I won't do it; it might make Mr. Westervelt unhappy. Would it, dear? Ha ha ha. No, I am not going to think of those gay days any more. I am a married woman now, and live in the country, and don't go to a party above once a year. But why can't we have a little dance to-night? What do you say, you bachelors? Come, Robert and Mr. Fitz Hugh, wouldn't you like a dance, now, really?"

"First rate!" roars Bob. "I havn't danced, it seems to me, for this seven hundred years. I say, Fitz Hugh, can't you shake a foot?"

"Happy to be present, but rarely dance," I muttered, totally disgusted with the proposition. All gayety and mirth in this family, now, seemed to me like laughter by the side of an open grave.



CHAPTER XVIII.

SAD HEART AND SILLY HEAD.

EVERY day for a week I resolved that on the morrow I would leave Seacliff. But the morrow, that is, the morrow of action, is a timid, forbearing circumstance, extremely unwilling to force itself upon humanity, rarely coming to those who do not seek it. It is not thus with the morrows of suffering; if it were, how often would the sun stand still on Gibeon!

In the mean time I kept up my habit of calling daily on Westervelts, telling myself that I ought not certainly to break off the intercourse while staying in the neighborhood, for fear of occasioning painful explanations or impertinent gossip. It is a charming circumstance in human nature that man can always find reasons for doing what he wishes to do. I tried to talk with Miss Westervelt as with an indifferent person; but I found that to me that form and face could no longer be indifferent; and since our conversations must no longer be free and sympathetic, they became drearily cold and embarrassed. Neither might demand, neither might offer a word such as could melt away the long fields of ice which had drifted between us. How often does it happen that two hearts, which would gladly approach and befriend each other, are separated, like Arctic discoverers, by frozen wastes, across which they can see but indistinctly, and pass over! One thing made me feel, not only unhappy, but

wicked. Somerville now talked a great deal to Miss Westervelt, in his most insinuating manner, and she received him, as it seemed to my jealousy, with something of that friendly familiarity which had once been accorded to me. Perhaps it is to punish my coldness, I thought, when I was most charitable and hopeful; but at other times I raved silently about the levity of the sex, and the easy admiration which it grants to rakes. I would not admit, indeed, that Miss Westervelt had become in any manner the victim of Somerville;— I only said to myself that she was one with him in the bonds of some inexplicable mystery, and therefore must always be divided from me.

Wretched amid the society around me, yet incapable of leaving it, I tried to revive my literary ambition, and planned a new book. Previous to my arrival at Seacliff, and while Miss Westervelt was no more to me, or not much more, than any other handsome girl, successful authorship had seemed to me the most precious reward offered to human exertion. There was one wish which had gone up from me oftener than any other; oftener than a desire for health, beauty, riches, or any of those things that men usually covet. It comes to me still at times, vested with superhuman attractions, and dowered with impossible glories. It is the longing to be full young once more, and yet possess all the power and energy of maturity. If that dream could be granted me, then would I waste no time in pleasure, none in idleness, none, as now, in despair, but, gathering all my intellectual and emotional nature into one effort, I would produce a work in literature that should make me famous at once, before another year signed me, and while I still barely stood on the threshold of manhood. To be distinguished young is a godlike lot which falls to few, and may well be envied, if only for its rarity; to be courted, admired, adored young, is a bribe glorious enough to pay for an early death. I confess that this resultless longing of mine, this cheating instinct of hope, has often risen to a passion of wayward desire, which, before any great

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d tribunal, would condemn me terribly. What should a stian preacher say of a man who would rather be Byron young than "such an one as Paul the aged?" And yet, we've been that man. Sometimes it has seemed to me that only completely successful being on earth is a belle of teen; a creature still possessing store of beauty and youth hope, whose social triumph is already perfected; the darkened to her by few sorrows, few disappointments no remorse; the present a throne on which she sits erribly, surrounded by her captives; the future a fairy land, n which Time has not yet stripped one rich illusion. rely are we men so fortunate; seldom does our tree of life r fruits and flowers commingled; our heads have begun whiten long before the world advances to crown them. I nk that men can feel much more deeply than women the ad wisdom and the blessed sympathy which breathes from t phrase of Hawthorne's, "The tranquil gloom of a dis- ointed soul!"

I made the skeleton of a novel in a single morning. It s a skeleton, indeed; a thing to frighten women and ldren; one of the ghastliest, wofullest dramas conceivable. e first three chapters were finished with a rapidity and e which would have done credit to Alexander Dumas & ., or to those inexhaustible human fountains whose romances eam through the New York Ledger. I had a powerful entive to write, aside from artistic sentiment and the de- : of distinction. The Westervelts had despised me and cast off, I said; and I was determined to make them respect and regret me. On the fourth day, full of love, hatred, enge, and ambition, I plunged into the fourth chapter with h spirit that I got over my head in less than an hour, and l to stop for another inspiration. A day passed, and then ther, and there I was still, and there I am. I could not, any ingenuity or perseverance, breathe the breath of life) that infamous skeleton so as to make it advance a single) further. It was a painful termination to literary effort,

certainly, and yet, I beg that the world will not waste too much pity upon me. It was only "one more unfortunate." The multitude of novels which have died in different stages of their manuscript existence, is, perhaps, not easily conceivable to the unromancing soul.

Rising one morning from that endless fourth chapter, I walked up to Seacliff, to repose my mind with a little cheerful conversation, as I cheatingly told myself. I found Bob Van Leer, the picture of moody *ennui*, swinging on the garden gate, which cracked and creaked despairingly under his ponderous carnality. At sight of me he put foot to earth again, yawned, stretched, and fell back against a post with his hands in his pockets.

"Hullo, Fitz Hugh! Glad to see you. It's a confounded dull morning. I've smoked, and I've whittled, and I've whistled, and finally I've swung on a gate, just as I used to when I was a boy."

"Why don't you talk to the ladies,—or rather to your lady?" said I. "Shame on you! a man who is courting and as good as engaged, and yet finds his time a burden!"

"It an't that, Fitz Hugh. I do talk to her all I can. But then Somerville comes in, and has a way of shoving a feller aside so. Blast him! I wish sometimes he'd clear out, for good. He's a right nice amusing feller in his place; but I don't want him to be playing his hook about my shark, you see."

It was certainly a harsh figure of speech to call Miss Westervelt a shark; but the comparison was Bob's poetical best, and I did not worry him by laughing at it.

"I should say it was high time for you to be jealous," I remarked. "Somerville is a fascinating man;—that is, in the opinion of some people."

A spark of comprehension kindled in his opaque brain, and flashed out through his eyes a look of alarm.

"What's that, Fitz Hugh? You don't mean to say he's courting her! Oh, Lord! she wouldn't have him; would she, Fitz Hugh?"

“Who knows? Women and weather are very uncertain.”

“Oh, no! she wouldn't think of such a thing, old feller. She an't that sort of a girl, to run after a gay chap because he can talk French and soft sodder. Why, he hasn't any tin, I tell you, and couldn't support her a week. I know all about Somerville. His father cut him off ten years ago. He's awfully in debt, and borrows of everybody. I'll tell you, as a secret, that I've lent him three or four hundred dollars myself this summer. I don't expect to see it again, and I didn't when I handed it over; but if I find out that he's really courting her, I'll be hanged if I don't dun him right before the whole of them. But he wouldn't be such a confounded scoundrel as to spend my money and cut me out, too!—eh, would he?”

“Better men have done worse things, under temptation. Besides, he might repay you with her money, and so settle that account honorably.”

“You don't say so, Fitz Hugh!” replied Bob, more and more uneasy. “Come, let's go into the parlor. He's there now, talking to her. I say, I ought to keep an eye on them, don't you think so. Oh, thunder and lightning! I thought I was all safe, and now—why, the old man has had another talk with me, and told me it was all right, and I might go in and win;—those wan't his words, you know, but that's the sense of them;—and now to think that this beggar, who hasn't a solitary red, should want to put in and spoil my sport,—oh, by Jove, it's too confounded bad!”

The last half dozen words were spoken in a whisper, as our shadows strode before us into the parlor. No one was in the room but Miss Westervelt and Somerville, engaged in an earnest conversation, apparently, but not sitting on the same sofa, as, with the absurd suspiciousness of a jealous man, I had feared that I should find them. She met my gaze so innocently, she made my own name sound so sweet to me by her utterance of it, she seemed to invite me with such a gentleness, beyond words, to demand her friendship once

more, that for a moment I had the desire to bend soul and knee to her. I could not talk, however, beyond repeating her "good-morning," and stammering some purposeless remark concerning no matter what, perhaps the weather. There were thoughts in me which would not let themselves be spoken, nor anything else that was worth speaking. One of those awkward pauses ensued which often occur when a *tête-à-tête* has been broken up by an intrusion; and in the midst of it I turned abruptly away to a centre-table, and commenced thumbing a portfolio of photographs. When I glanced at Miss Westervelt again her face was a little flushed, and she was bending close over her sewing. Bob stood bolt upright in the middle of the room, his hands thrust sternly into his breeches pockets, and his eyes fixed on Somerville's impassible face, with a ludicrous air of trying to discern the secret purposes which revolved within, as far away from the poor observer's ken, and as undecipherable by him, as the motions of the unknown stars.

"You will find the photographs worth your inspection, Mr. Fitz Hugh; especially if you have read (as I suppose you have) the Stones of Venice," observed Somerville.

I bowed to him, but I had neither words nor wish to reply. It was now several days since I had become distant and taciturn toward this man, hating him more and more bitterly every hour, although as yet no hour had come when I could decently express my bitterness. Robert soon gave over his physiognomical observations, completely dazed by that polished marble countenance and demeanor. Drawing a sigh and a chair, he seated himself by me, put his elbows on the table, put his face in his hands, and stared at the Venetian palaces, bottom upward, with an air of implacable aversion. From time to time he raised his eyes, as stealthily as such big slow optics could rise, to get another look at his lady-love and her companion. As for me, I would not play the spy, and so sat with my back magnanimously turned; but I could not avoid overhearing nearly every word of their conversation.

"Apropos of Venice,—Shakspeare!" observed Somerville. "I believe that you adore Shakspeare."

"It is not womanly, perhaps," she said; "but I do."

"Not womanly! But henceforward it is womanly," he replied in a tone so flattering, that it seemed to make Miss Westervelt at once the great exemplar and leader of her sex. "Indeed, women, gifted as they are with a high degree of artistic sensibility, ought to be the first in discovering real genius and the most devout in worshipping it. I suppose it is their charity alone which makes them encourage so many little authors."

Here I felt myself hit, and rustled the photographs very gently.

"I do positively believe," he continued, "that we should be far better off if we could get rid of the numberless insignificant books which now dissipate our time and brains, and confine ourselves to the study of some few master minds. I should like to select for the world's reading, Homer, Plato, Dante, Bacon, Shakspeare, and Milton; and first, before these even, I would of course place the Bible."

I could hardly help laughing outright and angrily to hear him name the Bible among his literary favorites.

"Oh! I beg pardon; I came near committing a great injustice. I absolutely forgot for a moment that Mr. Fitz Hugh was in print," he added in such a very pleasant tone that the words really did not sound much like irony. "Allow me to subjoin the *Idler in Italy* to my list of master pieces. Mr. Fitz Hugh, am I to have your thanks?"

"Grateful of course for being put once and forever alongside of Shakspeare and the rest of them," said I, over my shoulder. "But I decidedly disapprove your plan of exterminating the little authors. It would be just as reasonable to destroy all the machinery in the world except the steam-engine, the hydraulic ram, and one or two other apparatus of immense power. Suppose a gentleman had a couple of hydraulic-rams in his dining-room,—I think he would still

miss his nut-crackers. Besides, how many minds have just calibre enough to take in a small author or two, and no more. Depend upon it, that the masses would not learn to read, if all reading were forbidden except works of the highest genius."

"That's so," confirmed Bob. "If I couldn't get hold of anything more interesting than old Milton and Shakspeare, I wouldn't read a page, year in and year out."

"Ah, Robert! for your sake I would spare the *Pirate's Own Book*," smiled Somerville.

"I read as much as you do," asseverated Bob, loudly and angrily.

Up to this time the poor fellow had always bowed his head meekly before Somerville's bland irony, and had seemed anxious to improve by it in some blundering fashion, rather than to justify himself or to retort bitterly. It was jealousy which soured him now, and made him seek occasion of quarrel.

"*Bah! ne nous fuchons pas.* My opinions are not worth a discussion," observed Somerville tranquilly, and without even a stare of surprise at this revolt of one of his subjects.

"Oh! you get off by talking French," muttered Bob, smothering his indignation, and turning to the photographs with an asphyxiated countenance. For the moment he was, I suspect, angry even with Miss Westervelt, because she had heard him satirized without rushing to his rescue.

"I say, Fitz Hugh," he growled, "I wish we was in Venice together. I'd just buy one of these palaces and have a gondola, and stay there all my life. I'm dead tired of America,—hanged if I an't!"

He glanced at Mary, as if to see how she bore the implied threat, and, discovering probably, no conspicuous alarm in her face, rose sullenly from the table and stalked out of the house. I followed as if to speak to him, but he had vanished, and so I stood in the hall, hesitating.

"Robert is horribly jealous of me," I heard Somerville say.

She made no answer in words, but she must have made one in look. Was the glance kindly, or reproving? I would have given all the worlds I possessed to know.

"And so is our other friend, the *littérateur*," he added.

"Hush!"

"They might well be, if they knew my thoughts." (No answer.) "No occasion for it, I fear, if they know yours."

"Nobody knows my thoughts," she said. "I have no thoughts on such subjects."

"So much the worse for me! But, really, what you say there is quite cruel. You have no thoughts on such subjects? You never think how to make men happy? I declare that no woman has a right to bury her talent for causing happiness. Be it beauty, or intelligence, or a noble heart, or all those things together, she is morally bound to use it."

I started to find that I was eavesdropping, and escaped out of doors noiselessly. This is a specimen of the visits that I now made in that house which had once, and not long ago, been to me the House Beautiful. I entered it gloomy, and left it miserable, without a single tatter of happiness, or even of hope, to wrap around my poverty-stricken spirit. Somerville had but to sit down by Miss Westervelt, to pay her a few compliments, to address her in a low tone, and in a moment or two I fled away, as easily, naturally, and to all appearance, as unobservedly, as any random mote of dust might drift out of a window. I wish the reader to conceive clearly how forlorn I was when I quitted Seacliff this morning, how chafed and hopeless, how full of romance, fictitious and real, in order that he may judge with some leniency the part which I played in another scene immediately after.

From the edge of the bluff I discovered Mrs. Van Leer on the beach below, conchologizing with the usual ostentation of spotless hosiery. She was strolling westward along the shore, and by the time I overtook her was within twenty rods of the lonely wooded point which I have mentioned as The Cedars.

"Ah!" said she, affecting to start. "How slyly you come upon people! One would think you had bad intentions."

"The worst in the world," I replied, "My object is to flirt with a married lady."

"Oh! what a hor—rible idea!" she laughed. "Do let me dis—suade you. But first who is the poor doomed creature? Is it Mrs. Treat?"

"Fairer game than that. But never mind now who she is. I will tell you by and by, when we get to the Cedars."

"Oh, but I am not going to the Cedars. That would nev—er do. Do you suppose that I would trust myself to the fascinations of such a woman—killer as you?"

Talking, picking up shells, skipping pebbles along the still water, we strolled onward, and in about ten minutes reached the bare sandy neck of the point. There was a moment's halt on the miniature ridge, to look at the long curves of beach running either way, to jest, to laugh, to simper; and then, with a hypocritical air of unconsciousness, as if we did not know that we were advancing, we loitered down the hillock to a lonelier strand. The Treat house and Seacliff were both hidden now, and not a dwelling was visible along the western coast nearer than half a mile. To the left of us a faintly-marked footpath edged the shore of the point, diverging after a space into the thickest of the underwood, and coming out, as I knew, upon a small plateau, half bare rock and half meagre turf, which formed the southern close of the lilliputian promontory.

"What a beau—tiful site for a summer-house the Cedars would be!" said Mrs. Van Leer, at gaze. "I sometimes think it would be prettier even than Seacliff. I have talked to Henry about setting up a cot—tage on it."

"Suppose we go and pick out a building spot," I suggested.

Without another word, we walked down the path and entered the close grove of stunted, rusty wind-twisted ever-

ceas. The low, stiff, horizontal branches projected across the narrow footway at every yard, and I frequently had to draw them aside to give passage to Mrs. Van Leer's voluminous drapery, which caught and tangled and tore in a fretting manner. We had both become distressingly silent, but danced, every other moment, at each other's faces. Once or twice, when I caught her eyes returning over and over again to mine in the course of a few seconds, she laughed lightly, but with a tremulous twitter of embarrassment, while a red spot gradually deepened in the centre of her cheek. Silent still, silent as burglars stealing through midnight, we reached the plateau and entered a rocky lap or indentation at its extreme edge. Seacliff was invisible, and every other house; so was the long line of beach even, except a low cape far to the eastward; nothing earthly faced us but the ripples of the Sound, vessels passing miles away, and, beyond them, the yellow shore of Long Island. Mrs. Van Leer's face was quite flushed, and her hand trembled, as I aided her to descend a smooth plate of granite into this sequestered hollow. Then, instead of seating herself on a broad shelf of rock, or lounging on a bank of dry turf, as I expected to see her do, she took possession of a stone isolated from every other and disposed her dress about her with nun-like modesty. Was she getting frightened at the compromising position in which she had deliberately placed herself? I guessed so, and felt half indignant at the changeable creature, at once reckless and skittish; for her air of guileful caution was so conspicuous and so evidently put on against me, that it seemed an imputation. Feeling a little insulted, I walked to a ledge of rock some fifteen feet distant from her, seated myself, and fell on staring at the white-winged coasters which were passing each other eastward and westward. My reserve either reassured her or piqued her, for she presently commenced conversation.

"Beau—tiful! Don't you think it is a pretty site for a house, Mr. Fitz Hugh?"

"Yes; but it is prettier without a house. It would be a pity to spoil such a picturesque lounging-place by crowding it with walls, fences, and garden-walks. If I owned Seacliff, I would buy this point and keep it just as it is. It is a spot to visit, and not to live in."

"I think so too," she replied; and then followed another silence.

I stood looking out to sea, vacant of purpose, irresolute, tossing, drifting, like the wavelets which flowed and beat each other, and broke and rose again in random unrest before my eyes. Suddenly, I do not know whence, a wind of ridicule blew upon me, giving my thoughts a new impulse and setting them, full sea, toward a shore of jest and laughter. It would be a wonderful joke, it seemed to me in that absurd instant, to scare this silly woman. It would set her down and serve her right and teach her better.

"But,—Mrs. Van Leer," I said, rising and walking deliberately up to her, "I promised to tell you what lady I meant to flirt with."

She laughed faintly and gave me a quick nervous glance of apprehension, but did not speak.

"Of course," I went on, "it must be somebody whom I can sit near and talk to in whispers."

As I said this, I bent over her, and, taking her hand, held it firmly, notwithstanding a weak effort which she made to withdraw it. It was the only time in my life that I had ever addressed a woman so insolently; and I was astonished to see how this poor trifler quailed before my audacity; how terrified she was, and yet how helplessly fascinated.

"Oh! don't, Mr. Fitz Hugh!" she gasped, rising hastily, but not retreating. "I beg of you! I was only jesting. Oh! I ought not to have come here. Oh! please let us go back."

There was no menace in her manner, no defiance, no resistance even; nothing but an air of supplication, as if I had a right to command and be obeyed. Thank Heaven! I had at least enough manliness in me to be ashamed of my coarse

just the moment I saw her alarm; and it was partly to reassure her that I burst into a laugh as I dropped her hand and stepped a pace backwards.

"What are you laughing at?" she said, taking courage a little. "Oh, but why did you speak to me that way? Let us go back, Mr. Fitz Hugh, if you please."

"I didn't know that you were such a coward," I replied, with a feeling more akin to contempt than repentance. She was like those feeble spirits, I thought, whom Dante saw just within the gate of the Inferno, who were neither good nor evil, and of whom his guide said scornfully, Let us speak no more of them, but look and pass on. "You are as timid as a baby crying because it is spoken to by a stranger," I continued. "Well, let us go back, then. You don't care to hear about the flirtation?"

"Not here. It isn't a proper place to talk about such things," she said with a simplicity which made me smile in her face. "And you know it, too," she added, picking up her dignity a little. "Let me give you one piece of advice, Mr. Fitz Hugh. I have seen more of society than you have, by a year or two; and I know what I am talking about. If people want to flirt, they should do it at a party or a ball. That is the proper place for it, sir."

The theory was so characteristic of her, so novel, so ludicrous, that I could not possibly help another burst of laughter. She seemed quite annoyed, as well as a trifle puzzled, at my amusement, and walked off sulkily, refusing to speak except to fret at the cedar branches for catching in her beirage dress. So after a while I apologized for laughing; then I thanked her solemnly for her advice; and the silly creature was satisfied.

When I was a boy, I used to amuse myself with running down a pet bantam rooster, coddling him a little, and letting him escape. While I was after him, he cackled with terror; while I held him under my arm, he was as quiet and pettable as a dog; but the moment I dropped him on his legs, he ran

off to a safe distance and crowed defiantly and triumphantly. Just so behaved the sprightly bantam lady whom I now galanted from the spot where I had scared her. The moment that she got out of the woods, she cackled lustily over my naughtiness and its utter discomfiture, flinging bravados,—paucans,—of lively scorn at me because I had “wanted to be so saucy, but dared not.”

“Aha!” said she, “I know how to manage you *fast* gentlemen. I have had some experience with just such high young fellows as you are. You thought you could throw dust in my eyes; but you caught it back again hot and heavy.”

“Yes, yes; I allow it; I don’t deny it,” returned I, trying to give as much politeness as possible to the smile which I could not repress. “I concede and testify that I have behaved like a fast man and been treated like a slow one.”

“Aha! aha! yes, indeed!” she chuckled. “And that’s the way you’ll always find yourself treated when you try your impudence on me.”

“Impudence! Mrs. Van Leer!!” I remonstrated, with a heart-broken look. “Well, if it has come to *that*,—if you can charge me seriously with *that*,—I may as well leave Seacliff at once.”

“No, no, Mr. Fitz Hugh!” she replied hastily. “Don’t be annoyed; don’t be angry, now. Come, you didn’t take me seriously, did you? I really didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. I meant *fast*, you know; and I don’t blame a gentleman for being fast occasionally, provided he doesn’t carry it too far.”

On the whole, my impertinence had evidently been quite a treat to her, and she liked me all the better for having given her such a delightful five minutes of excitement. Women dote on emotions, because these appeal to the larger and more vigorous part of their nature; and consequently they are partial to such events, and such men too, as produce in their throbs and blushes and tremors. Why is it that so many women are always to be found at a public execution? No

because the mere raw spectacle of violent death is pleasing to them; but because the thrill which it gives to the nerves is at once a fascination and a luxury.

When I parted from her at the gate of the Seacliff grounds, she shook hands, and protested, with a ludicrous air of forgiving innocence, that she was not angry with me. As for me, ashamed of my conduct, remorseful for it and resolved not to repeat it, why was it that I flirted with her the next day and the day after, and so on for days together? Well, there were various reasons for the folly, although no excuses. In the first place I felt a vindictive satisfaction in it because it seemed to avenge in some stupid, animal way, the wrongs which my heart had suffered, and was suffering, from another quarter. In the second place I had introduced Mrs. Van Leer into my novel; had recreated her into a woman of problematical virtue, but fascinating manners; and had ended by making the thought of her attractive to my fevered imagination. Thus, from writing a bad romance, I fell to acting a bad reality, which is certainly somewhat more contemptible. Very often, indeed, I had a desire to tell the lady that she was one fool and I another; but as the things that I really said were quite contrary to those assertions, we grew daily more intimate and ridiculous. Did ever any sane person but me suspect himself of being an idiot? That humiliating supposition often assaulted me in my latter teens, when I first began to feel awkward in the presence of women; and now it pointed its mocking finger at me again as I grimaced and chattered at the feet of Mrs. Van Leer. Why in the name of common sense should I not charge myself with cretinism? I was neglected (I thought) by the Westervelts, courted by the leaden Bob and feather-brained Cousin Jule, and knew that I hourly uttered things which deserved to bring me either to a whipping-post or to a shaved head and mustard-plasters.



CHAPTER XIX.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

IT will be easily imagined, I think, that I could not long find existence tolerable here. There is a melancholy pleasure in haunting the place where one's hopes were ruined; but this pleasure comes not until after the tragedy is consummated and long since bygone. First, we are led away from the spot by Our Lady of Tears, and then we are kept afar from it for a weary time by Our Lady of Sighs, and at last we come back to it holding the cold hand of Our Lady of Darkness. The light of life was fresh in the heart when we fled; but when we return that heart is like an extinguished lantern: it sheds no gleam *through* the darkness, and it cannot be seen *for* the darkness. People behold us daily, and say that they know us, but they have not even guessed that we suffer, because our faces have long since ceased to be indicators of the soul. Let a clock be stopped by any accident, and for centuries after, if you do not disturb it, the hands will point steadily to the moment of that catastrophe. It is never quite thus with human beings, except in cases of lunacy. The man's heart beats no more; it has ceased loving, and so has ceased living; but exteriorly he is the same that he was before; the indexes of thought and action still move with deceptive calmness. He walks among the graves of his own hopes, but he cries not, neither cuts himself with stones. He sits alone and keeps silence by the side of Our Lady of

Darkness, but no one divines the cause of his solitude, and no one can see his mighty companion.

But I had not yet reached this woe. It was Our Lady of Tears who now called me, bidding me with a voice which I alone heard, to forsake all and follow her. Every day she said, you must leave this place; and at last she ordained it so that I could not disobey. So with a calm countenance, but earnest, questioning eyes, I faced the being from whom I had hoped never to part, and stammered some phrases of farewell that passed in that instant from my memory. What one of all the miserable can remember the exact words with which he bade adieu to hope and welcomed despair? It was as if he had not uttered them, but as if they had been breathed far above his will and beyond his hearing by the awful *Mater Lachrymarum*.

It must not be supposed that ever tears dropped from my eyelashes, nor that this repression of the signs of grief proved that my yoke was light and my burden easy to be borne. Many who weep not, many who smile, are in secret led by Our Ladies of Sorrow. The tears fell not outwardly, consolingly upon my cheek, but inwardly, poisonously, upon my heart, as I turned away from this spot where I had been so happy, and entered into a future which was already sere and leafless and fruitless. For some time I was alone, even amid multitudes. A great disappointment which no sympathy can alleviate and which may not be spoken in words, separates a man from his fellows and makes earth seem to him uninhabited.—

Thus commenced the fourth chapter of my romance, and thus it finished. As it will sometimes happen to an inexperienced chorister, I had pitched my tune so high that I could not sing it through, and came to a dead stop over the first *affetuoso*. The plot of the story, so far as it had one, was the mystery of Seaclyff, such as I then supposed it to be, with the consequences which I imagined would naturally flow from it.

I was to quit the spot and tramp restlessly about the world, a groaning hysterical hero of the Childe Harold stamp, an object of tearful pity to all the handsome girls on my route, but savagely refusing to be comforted. After a lonesome perambulation of eight or ten years, during which wealth and power were to force themselves upon me, I was to come back, like the Count of Monte Cristo, in search of my friends and my enemies. Seacliff was to be a desolation, and the family of Seacliff extinct. Johnny Treat, grown to manhood, (rather precociously,) would meet me among the charred ruins of the bluff, and, seated on a blackened cornerstone, narrate the fates of the Westervelts. Mary was lying in the graveyard, the broken-hearted though innocent victim of Somerville's cruelty. Mr. Westervelt had committed suicide, after having been swindled of everything by his dissolute son-in-law, (Somerville,) and cast off by his adamantine father. Mrs. Westervelt and Genevieve had perished slowly of shirt-making and consumption.

After hearing the story I would rise, turn away from John Treat, raise my moist optics to Heaven and take a silent oath of vengeance. Then the first thing would be to catch Westervelt senior in a perilous speculation, (Monte Cristo again,) trip him up, empty his pockets to the uttermost farthing, and send him to die in the almshouse, or perhaps force him to steal and so finish him off at Sing-sing. And now for Somerville, the deep, the dark, the double dyed villain! I would track him like a bloodhound;—I would follow him over land and over sea;—I would bring him to bay in some remote lair. There I would do his business in a duel fought with Colt's revolvers, altogether regardless of the fact that I am no duelist, and would not allow myself to be shot at with even a single-barrelled pistol if I could help it. In the smoke of that deadly discharge, in the blood of that sufficing vengeance, the story would terminate.

I think that this is very much the sort of thing that a young man would hit on in his first attempt at a novel. Per-

haps the embryo Scott is not yet aware that true portraiture of character,—just analysis of human nature,—is the gem which lends practical value to a romance, gives it the power of fact under the grace of fiction, and places it among those kingly gifts that the world rejoices to receive. Even if he knows this, he is no better off, for he has not had time to study humanity, and, unless he is a genius, he cannot divine it. Now, it is a humiliating truth that certainly not more than one tenth of us even in America are geniuses. The young author, no wonder of mind, but still possessed of talents, writes away with a good heart at first ; but after finishing two or three chapters he becomes vaguely conscious that there is some important element of immortality wanting to his work ; and so, merely to save it from lethargy and early death, he dashes into rapid movement, passionate situations, and a rhetoric flavored with gunpowder. His own stores of these valuables soon giving out, he plagiarizes in his desperation, stealing one man's hero, another man's murder, and a third man's simile. His conscience is too uninstructed in the rights of literary property to reprove him ; it is honorable, no doubt, but it has not yet learned the beauty, nor in fact, the exact nature of originality ; and thus he picks pockets right and left with as honest a zeal as if he were clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. The reader has observed what use I made of De Quincey's terrible Ladies of Sorrow. Now I scarcely thought of De Quincey at all when I wrote that passage. I scribbled away with a single-heartedness which was its own reward, and with a heated fluency of imitation which I took for the inspiration of genius. They were not De Quincey's Ladies of Sorrow ; they were my ladies, and I meant to become famous by them. It only required a couple of foolscap sheets, however, to prove that my supposed ownership was a sham, and that I had no more prospect of making those remarkable females mine than I had of marrying the Empress of France or the Queen of Sheba. I had not evoked Levana and her companions, and they would not obey me. They

dragged me high into the clouds, as Mr. Thurston was carried up by his runaway balloon ; and when I could hold on no longer, I dropped, and that was the end of me. Yes, the novel was bound to ruin from the moment that I seized the skirts of the Ladies of Sorrow.

13 *





CHAPTER XX.

CAKES AND ALE.

SOME happy, but ludicrous people are romantic all their lives; others, like myself for instance, are only romantic when they are in love. Just now I was uncommonly subject to my imagination, and might have been led by it to almost any extremity, nice or naughty. I had been reading that singular autobiography, that unparalleled narrative of crime and criminals, the Memoirs of Vidocq, the famous agent of the French secret police; and the artful dodges by which he detected and entrapped villains, the bloodhound scent, by which he followed them even into the caverns of their purposes, had strongly excited my fancy. It occurred to me that I would be a Vidocq to Somerville, and beguile that pickpocket of reputations into some predicament where his rascality would become palpable, or he would himself confess it. My starting conception was to play the eavesdropper; but in the first place this was a disagreeably nasty character to assume, even for good ends; and in the second I had already watched him, half unconsciously, for a month or more without any practical result. I had heard compromising things from him, indeed, but others had not heard them with me, and so they were not evidence. At last, after having sifted my brains to the bottom, and given myself more worry than it would have cost Vidocq to circumvent a galley-load of ruffians, I devised a dirty sort of pit, by no means bottomless, into which I hoped to entice my

great adversary. I am almost ashamed to say a word more about this my masterpiece of subtlety. It was nothing but the simple, clumsy, vulgar idea of getting Somerville drunk, and then trying to make him babble. I know that I shall obtain no mercy from my total-abstinence reader, and I am not so uninformed of the nature of my transgression as to plead with him for any; but to all less virtuous persons I stretch out deprecating hands, imploring them to remember how young I was, and what a villain this man was, and what he had made me suffer, as well as others who were dear to me.

My plot once formed, I became very polite to Somerville in order to disarm his suspicions. An opponent is always beaten the easiest when you bring his own favorite weapon to bear upon him; if you can out-compliment a flatterer, or out-bluster a bully, you gain a seeming of advantage, which wins you the game in the first flush of your adversary's perplexity. It will be observed that Shakspeare has plagiarized this idea from me and embodied it in his *Taming of the Shrew*. From how many of us moderns has not that man plagiarized! Somerville was not easily outdone in graciousness; he always responded readily and melodiously to the touch of civility; and thus for some days we made a duet of politeness which was ravishing to the ear; or, to change the figure, we commingled like two purling rivers of "soft sawder."

Fortune soon favored my plot by sending off the Westervelts to eat the birthday dinner of Westervelt senior, and by inspiring Cousin Jule to take their escort down to New York for the purpose of a shopping foray. The two Van Leers, Hunter, and Somerville were left to keep bachelor's hall at Sealcliff. Now I could give my debauch without much risk that any excesses which might result from it would come under the eyes or reach the ears of that young person whose good opinion I still coveted.

"Mr. Somerville," said I, "I owe you and your friends

here a thousand thanks for the humanity with which you have helped me kill my greatest enemy, Time. I never expect to repay you, but I have hit on an awkward way of showing my sense of the obligation. Suppose, gentlemen, you all take dinner with me at the Rockford Hotel to-morrow."

Somerville accepted with that air of frank gratitude which was so charming in him. The Van Leers and Hunter accepted also, each after his fashion; the brothers in their undemonstrative, heavy way,—not exactly stony,—more like timber; Hunter with a jump into the air and a cock-a-doodle-doo of defiance for my champagne bottles.

I rode over to Rockford, and bespoke a five o'clock dinner of birds and whatever other delicacies were in season.

The appointed hour came, and we found ourselves at table. The bill of fare consisted of soup, trout, bass, partridges, woodcock, squirrels, all the vegetables of Yankeedom, and a dessert of such things as one generally finds far away from pavements. As for the wine, I had attended to that myself, and felt sure that I could not be left adry.

"Claret and champagne!" exclaimed Hunter, glancing at my platoon of bottles. "Those *are* drinks to offer to a gentleman. May the blessing of Bacchus abide with you, Fitz Hugh! May the immortal gods be your most humble servants!"

"Some of them are hard masters," observed Somerville.

"That rum old Bacchus, for example," added Henry Van Leer. "Don't he lay it on sometimes!"

"Henry, you are a blasphemer," cried Hunter, who seemed to get lively on the mere smell of the corks. "Henry, I am afraid you are not a religious man. How dare a mortal utter such a sentiment in the face of a gold seal! Henry, remember that you may die at any moment. By the way, couldn't a fellow get up a pun on gold seals and seal fishing? Fitz Hugh, the soup is excellent. I will propose the landlord for an honorary member of our P. B. society at college. No

more, I thank you, Fitz Hugh ;—I don't want to weaken my claret. Mr. Somerville, what is your opinion of eating and drinking ?”

Hunter talked beyond himself when he was happy, and two glasses made him happy. Four were enough for his susceptible brain, and the sixth became to him that fearful though diminutive enemy, that little thing which has done so great harm in the world, a drop too much. I looked at him with a presentiment of remorse as I thought how soon he would be under my table.

“ I have the greatest respect for eaters and drinkers,” said Somerville. “ In the first place, there are so many of them ! *Vox populi, vox Dei*. You are quite right, Mr. Hunter, in demanding reverence for the things and men of the table. The gastronomist has never received justice from mankind except in France ; and the consequence is that the French are the most refined people in the world. One of the blessed results of the French revolutions is that they dispense such a number of good cooks throughout other countries. A good cook, gentlemen, is a philanthropist ; he is a missionary of digestion, happiness, and virtue ; and the gastronomist is his patron, his Mæcenas. But I beg you, Mr. Hunter, as you value your reputation for politeness and *savoir vivre*, not to confound the gastronomist with the glutton. The glutton has no taste, but simply a capacity for containing. All his acquaintance with the mysteries of the table amounts to knowing the solids from the fluids. Anything that goes down answers his brute purpose. Then there is the unfortunate practical eater, who supposes that we eat to live, and who judges of a dinner not so much while he tastes it as when he comes to digest it. Compared with such commonplace, Gradgrind people as these, the gastronomist is an artist, a poet. I wish there was a nation of epicures to conquer the world and teach it cookery, as the Greeks taught it art, and the Romans law. Gentlemen, I propose the gastronomist as an object of our reverential meditation.”

Hunter's mouth had been open and his tongue trembling for some seconds. In general this youth was a miserably poor listener, granting small appreciation to the wit or wisdom of others, and only hearing you so far as you afforded him opportunity for what he considered a brilliant reply. But Somerville had put a bit in his jaw, and could hold him to silence as long as he chose to speak; for it is a matter of necessity with the would-be scapegrace and man of the world that he should fall down before the real one and worship him; the instinct is one of his moral vitals, and he cannot be supposed to exist without it. Hunter drank the toast, and then, bowing pointedly to Somerville, offered another.

"To the gastronomist of conversation!"

"A nice compliment and a tolerable figure; but somehow I have a vague sensation that I have heard it from you before; perhaps in some former state of existence, now," responded Somerville, with that combined irony of thought and flattery of smile which I had often noticed in him. "You know, my friend, that the better a remark is, the less you can repeat it; while, the more commonplace it is, the more allowable is iteration. You may say, 'Fine morning' — 'Beautiful weather,' day after day, without being considered a bore. But throw out a truly good joke, and you must never utter it again, at least not in the same company."

"Gentlemen," said Hunter, smiling joyously around the table, "I call on you to reprove Mr. Somerville for despising my poverty out of the midst of his abundance."

The toady absolutely purred under his rebuke; as pleased as Boswell when badgered by the great lexicographer; as submissive as a good dog when kicked by his master. Robert Van Leer was far from being in so heavenly a humor. Disgusted, perhaps, with Hunter's sycophancy, and at all events disliking the object of it, he would not trouble himself to restrain a growl.

"I say, I'd never brag of being a gourmy," he remarked.

“ Pretty thi
nice dish an

“ Please t
observed S
shapes. W
fections, suc
one tune fro

“ Oh—ye
know how to

“ The fact
remarked, by
a stop to the

“ Very tr

“ Every man
men ; not in
simply beca
give each of
than commo
and keep it
demolishes
believe that

In general v
our own pec
versally, an
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feared that
of it ; and s

“ Well,” I
sharp as the

“ My der

with his most caressing smile. "Allow me to take a glass of wine with you."

I know that the remark puzzled Robert at the time, and I doubt if he ever decided whether it was irony or compliment.

We were far along in the courses by this time, for I pass over much of our conversation. I drank as little as might be, but pushed the bottles about vigorously, and engaged my guests in those vinous comparisons of brands and vintages, which so few men esteem odious until the next morning. Somerville took his liquor without stint, but was not at all the worse for it. From course to course, from bottle to bottle, I watched him sedulously, though cautiously, without discovering that his wits wandered, that his tongue tripped, or that his eye had a more humid sparkle than usual. I did not despair, however, but encouraging myself with the words of the heroic Taylor, "A little more grape," continued to bring up my bacchanalian artillery. The Van Leers strove on, like the two Ajaxes, side by side, stubborn, victorious. Perhaps it might be set down as a general rule, that timber heads are not easily mellowed and that the fewer ideas a man has, the less likely they are to be muddled by alcohol. Hunter fought as adventurous a battle as any of them, but with far inferior success. The claret staggered him; the first glass of champagne penetrated a vital part; and by the time we reached the dessert he lost his sense of decency and began to tell vulgar stories.

"Capital, my dear friend," said Somerville. "Very brilliant in its way, that was; but then, don't you see that you are discouraging the rest of us? I have always noticed that fat or profane stories kill conversation. After such a piece of voluptuousness as that, for instance, there is a ridiculous but natural feeling in the company, that to offer anything of a modest nature would be to insure ill-success. It is like hock after brandy; nobody can taste it. So now, be modest, my good fellow, and suffer us to be modest."

"All right, Somerville," maundered Hunter. "But I wish

you could hear some of our fellahs talk. Oh—h, jaw—ly Junes !”

“ But I say, I think swearing helps out a thing sometimes,” remarked Henry Van Leer.

“ A poor thing, yes ; but not a good one,” said Somerville. “ A really good thing needs nothing but a clear, concise statement in decent English to make it tell.”

“ Oh, but suppose a feller hasn’t got the gift of the gab.”

“ Well, let him acquire it. Let him, to begin with, get rid of such conversational awkwardnesses as profanity and vulgarity. I feel positive that in general the hardest swearer is the poorest talker, intellect being equal. He depends chiefly on a list of stupid oaths to give his jokes point. Now let him quit all that sort of thing ; let him throw aside his unmeaning balderdash of damns, and allow his mother-tongue a fair chance ; and, depend upon it, he will soon have a decorous vocabulary sufficient for any man’s social necessities. His words will represent ideas ; they will be really vigorous, sharp-edged, and picturesque ; and not, like the language of beasts, mere physical clamor. I believe it is conceded that in literature nothing is witty which depends for its point upon blasphemy. The cleverest talkers that I know of swear not at all.”

It was all admirable ; it was all according to Somerville’s usual practice ; but I still believed that the man was secretly given to cakes and ale.

“ Well, I’ve been to Washington,” observed Van Leer. “ Pretty much all the Congressmen swear.”

“ A set of vulgar snobs,” said Somerville. “ Three quarters of them have neither talent nor breeding ; they are just fit to lead in a Tammany caucus ; they are the merest roarers and wire-pullers.”

“ I remonstrate, Somerville,” exclaimed Hunter, with that pathetic solemnity which Nature vouchsafes to man when he is half drunk. “ I beg your pardon for correcting you, my eshteemed friend. But I love my country ; I reshpect the

fathers of my country; I respect Washington and Franklin and Adams; I respect Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Daniel Webster was the greatest orator that ever lived. I heard him speak when he addressed our fellows when I was a Fresh."

"Now stop that, Hunter," put in Robert. "That was when I was in college. Webster died the year before you entered."

"No he didn't," asserted Hunter. "I entered before him. I was there when he entered,—I mean when he spoke. I tell you, fellows, I've shaken hands with most all our big-bugs, and I respect 'em. I can't bear to hear even my esteemed friend Mr. Somerville talk disrespectfully."

"I apologize, Hunter," smiled Somerville. "I ought to have remembered, when I spoke of Congress, that you are behind the scenes."

The Van Leer throats trumpeted forth a gust of satiric laughter, as unfeeling as a northeaster howling over a shipwreck. Hunter, even when sober, had such a mania for representing himself as generally known, and for indulging in personal reminiscences of distinguished characters, extending even to things which happened before his birth, that, judging him by his own stories, you would have supposed him to be sixty or eighty years old, if not an outright centenarian. He went on with his antiquarian recollections, and presently described Webster as being six feet and a half high in his stockings feet. "What will you bet on it?" he asked, looking round the table domineeringly.

"You forget, Hunter; you mean sixteen feet and a half," roared Henry Van Leer, mimicking the poor young fellow's stammering speech.

"Mr. Hunter is quite correct, in one light," observed Somerville. "We do instinctively associate the ideas of mental and physical greatness. I have myself seen Webster when he seemed to be seven feet high. I have seen Rachel look loftier still. Every kind of sublimity produces this same illu-

sion. I am no musician ; I can't learn the simplest tune until I have heard it a dozen times ; I am as disgracefully ignorant of the notes as if I were a Yahoo ; but I am sensible to the exaltation of music, as I am to the exaltation of wine, although I cannot produce it. I tell you that I have heard strains in the Grand Opera of Paris, and many other places, that made me feel as if I were a hundred feet high,—as if I could rise up and stick my head through the roof,—as if I were lofty enough to have snow on my summits. Only two or three notes, perhaps, but in an instant I was above the atmosphere and could hardly breathe."

Somerville had already drunk two bottles, and yet he could talk thus rationally, if I may not say brilliantly. There seemed to be little hope indeed of bringing him to that friendly mellowness, that confidential irrationality, which lets out the inner man in a full stream. I would have pressed him to drink deeper, but in order to do that effectually, it was necessary that I should myself imbibe recklessly ; and the champagne had already mounted to my head, prudently as I had tipped. It was pretty clear that, whatever else he might be, he was no drunkard, chiefly, perhaps, from a difficulty in holding enough to disorder him. As a last resource, I turned the conversation on women, hoping that he might himself bring it around to the ladies of Seacliff, and utter some indiscretion which would open the eyes of my companions to the nature of his objects in the Westervelt family. It may be that it was a clever idea, but it succeeded exactly as ill as if it had been a stupid one.

"What is your opinion of this Woman's Rights movement?" was my cunning inquiry.

"Absurd ! The only essential woman's rights are the rites of marriage. If she gets those, she asks no other. I is chiefly old maids and females under the ban of ugliness who are carried away by this shrieking. Don't you see why They want revenge on the men for not offering themselves The whole thing has been arranged very properly by Provi

dence. We men must bear the great responsibilities of life, and the women must bear the little ones. So it always has been, and so it always will be. Why, the superiority of manhood is evident in the mere brute circumstance of avoirdupois. Wouter Van Twiller would be quite up to the question. Do you remember his ingenious method of settling the accounts of two litigious tradesmen by weighing their books against each other? Well, put that rule to work on our modern puzzle. Suppose there are seven million grown men in this country, and the same number of women. Now estimate each man at one hundred and forty-six pounds, or fourteen men to the ton, and you will have a gross masculine avoirdupois of about five hundred thousand tons. Estimating the women at one hundred and twenty-two pounds each, or eighteen to the ton, and you have only three hundred and eighty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight tons of female flesh. Can't a blind man see that the greater tonnage ought to make the smaller kick the beam? Why should Nature put so much more material into man, if he was not to lead? Of course, elephants, oxen, and so forth are excluded from this argument, as they have no souls. Gentlemen, here's to the memory of Wouter Van Twiller! Hunter, did you happen to know him?"

"Who?" inquired Hunter, solemnly. "Can't say. What shoshiety?"

The poor youth was by this time so far muddled, that, like Brahma in his eternal calm, past, present, and future were all one to him. He made a last effort now to shake off the evil genius which had risen from the green, slender-necked bottle at his elbow, and begun, Comus-like, to change him to a beast. Starting up resolutely, he took several turns about the room with the peculiar gait, composed of a skip and a shamble, which characterizes a calf in that early period of his infancy during which he is known to a certain order of naturalists as a "staggering bob."

"Excuse me, fellahs," said he. "Don't notish me. I want

to stretch my legs
rush through another
jaw—ly Junes!”

“Come, Hunter!
Henry Van Leer, I

“I believe you,
feel a little queer a

And down he laid
first on his elbow, t

“Ah! that is a
served Somerville,
Mr. Fitz Hugh, th

I rang the bell
The Jolly June was
and left to that aw

the drunkard. Th
with a certain sense
shut my eyes, fright

waiter. I asked him
noir.

“Some *what?*”
derstand the lingo o

“*Café noir*,—bla

“Black coffee!!
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"They can hardly rule children, and they cannot rule their adult inferiors. A merchant will employ a dozen clerks, and as many porters, and never speak of trouble with them, while his wife is perpetually fretting about the insubordination of her three female domestics. (Pretty domestics they are, who cannot be in the least domesticated, if the word means taming.) Every lone woman at the South is completely run over by her own niggers, her personal chattels, whom she can whip or sell as she chooses. Let our strong-minded angels give good proof of their administrative abilities in the nursery and kitchen, before they demand the Secretaryship of the Interior, or the middle seat of the Supreme Court. For my part, I believe that women are a weak set;—I *know* they are. They are easily flattered, easily fooled by sophistry. Aaron Burr was quite right in declaring that they craved flattery, and that every gentleman ought to treat them to it. Aaron Burr was a great man. The world has been hard upon him, when it would have done better to boast of him. I shouldn't feel worthy to untie the shoes of Aaron Burr. Of all men I owe him most, although I never saw him. His manners, his conversation, have done more to form me than any other influence which I can name. Of course, I do not approve his libertine ideas," he added, while a cold sneer glittered for a moment on his face, and then melted away in its prevailing blandness.

This was the style of his conversation that evening, and generally. It was a mixture of truth and error, but it had not the faintest leaven of drunkenness or dissoluteness.

We lighted our cigars as dusk came on, and thus my conspiracy ended in smoke. The innocent Hunter had fallen its only victim, and happily the innocent Hunter was one of those enthusiastic natures who look upon inebriety as a proof of the highest manliness.



CHAPTER XXI.

A RAY OF LIGHT.

IT is a common saying, that a certain bottomless and disreputable place is paved with good resolutions; and I think that in those times I might have contracted for the entire unfathomable job without alarming risk of failure. Every hour I admitted that I ought to quit Seacliff immediately, and came to a desperate determination to do so, but my silly heart dragged on my will like a ball and chain, rendering motion so painful that I called it impossible. There was one unhappy Fitz Hugh who was for going, and another unhappy Fitz Hugh who was for staying, and the latter was the most obstinate. One morning the two went up to Seacliff together, the strong-minded one declaring that he was about to bid Miss Westervelt an everlasting farewell, while his feebler brother whimpered that, for his part, he never could bring himself to do it, never!

She was sitting in the veranda, sketching leaves and vine-twists from that amatory honeysuckle beneath which I had once come so near confessing to her what I have repeatedly confessed to my, I hope, discreet reader. Her hand was rosy against the white glare of the paper; her face was downcast, marble-still, and wondrously shaded; her whole expression as beautiful as a perfect soul. All my being was moved to address her in words of exceeding gentleness, whether I bade her adieu or not; but in another instant I observed that she was dressed in that accursed plaid of

dead-leaf colors; and so I answered her kindly "Good morning" with a grave, silent bow.

At that moment, before I had opened my lips, Genevieve came into the veranda, nodded as she took a seat, glanced at her sister, then at me again, and burst out laughing. "I don't wonder you stare at that dress," said she. "Mary, you are found out."

"Indeed—I—I don't understand," I stammered, as I turned some tint or other, perhaps a plaid of dead-leaf colors.

"But you have seen the dress before, haven't you?" asked Genevieve.

"Yes," said I, gathering myself up in grim solemnity; "I have seen the dress *before*."

"I thought so," she replied, with a stare of surprise for my dramatic manner. "I knew it. Come, Sis, don't be vexed," she added, caressing Mary's cheek, which had flushed a trifle. "You attack my extravagance, and I take revenge on your economy. Which of us is the severest?"

"You are, Genevieve," said Mary. "You needn't have talked about this to Mr. Fitz Hugh, even if he had noticed it."

"For Heaven's sake, do explain!" I exclaimed, for I began to hope something better than my fears.

Genevieve laughed at my eagerness, and Mary put me out of my misery. "Why, this is all, Mr. Fitz Hugh. I am wearing an old silk of mamma's. She gave it to me two or three weeks ago, and I made it over for myself. It was the sheer spirit of saving; for I dislike plaids, in general. There."

"Oh!!" said I. Not another word did I utter; not another sound arose from the great whirl of gladness within me; but I might have talked a year without speaking so much as I did in that single syllable. I presume that my eyes flashed and my cheeks flushed, as if with wine, for everything around me looked dream-like, and in my ears

there was a hum of blood rushing to the brain. I wished that Genevieve would take herself away. It would have been agreeable to have the sky shut down and cover noon with midnight. I wanted to kneel at Mary's feet unseen, and ask her pardon unheard, by the hour together, for the hateful suspicions which I had harbored against her. It would not do to tell her of them; not even to let her doubt of them; no, that would never do. I was the guilty one now, because I had heard innocence accused without vindicating it; but I must never confess my turpitude, or I might receive a punishment greater than I could bear; I must try to live my repentance, so that forgiveness should be granted without ever having been asked in words.

"You don't feel disposed to laugh at my economy, I hope," she said.

"Not at all. I admire it," returned I, with such a fervor of voice and manner that she glanced at me to see whether I was in jest or earnest.

"Well, I never!" laughed Genevieve. "No, I never did! as Mrs. Treat expresses it. What enthusiasm about a little saving! I must run and put on a pair of old shoes to please Mr. Fitz Hugh."

She danced away giggling, and did me the favor not to return. In a spirit of becoming meekness, diffidence, and worship, I approached Miss Westervelt, and, standing partly behind her, looked at her unobserved, under pretence of watching the progress of the drawing. I was afraid, or rather I hoped, that I disturbed her, for the little fingers did not sketch quite as deftly as usual, and I could see, in spite of the drooped head and the overhanging masses of golden rippled hair, that the blood was burning bright in the blonde cheek. I should like to know who wrote that delicious little poem in an old number of "Putnam," beginning with this verse:—

"I treasure in secret some long, fine hair
Of tenderest brown, but so inwardly golden,

I half used to fancy the sunshine there
 Was only caught for a moment and holden
 While I could say 'Dearest!' and kiss it, and then
 In pity let go to the summer again."

That long, fine hair, of tenderest brown, but so inwardly golden, I have seen it, I know it, it was hers, but I could not have described it so.

One false stroke followed another on the paper, until she suddenly stopped sketching with a little gesture of despair. "Oh, these warm mornings!" she said. "They make me nervous. I can't draw."

"One can hardly draw his breath," I replied; but my heart was not in the quibble.

Then there was a silence which I was only half conscious of, but which may have been embarrassing to her, inasmuch as she broke it by an abrupt change in the conversation. "I understand that you will leave Seacliff in a day or two, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

"Indeed!" said I. "Oh! yes. No, not at all. Who told you?"

"Robert."

"Ah, Robert did, did he? Yes, I believe I did say something of the sort to Robert. But I've changed my mind;—I mean I was joking;—Robert takes everything so in earnest! I certainly never intended to go,—except in case of — of unforeseen circumstances. I don't think I could pass the summer anywhere else more agreeably; that is, not half so agreeably."

There are moments when a man feels like taking himself by the hair of his head, and hustling himself out of the room, with every expression of contempt and contumely that can be applied, properly or not properly, to a blockhead. I think that I never had a more animated sense of the gulfs of stupidity which at times open themselves within me, than I had while I was maundering these contradictions and imbecilities. I tried to awaken my wits, but before they could dictate a

word to me, Miss Westervelt spoke again. Her eyes were fixed on her sketch, and her voice was very low and slightly tremulous, as she said, "Mr. Fitz Hugh, what ought a lady to do with anonymous letters?"

"Burn them," I answered, after a long look of wonder at the question. "Burn them, and think no more of them. I never knew any truth or good to come by an anonymous letter."

"I have been troubled lately with anonymous correspondents," she continued, gravely. "I have shown the letters to no one yet, but I have a great mind to let you see them. Perhaps I ought to do it, for they concern you. Here they are,—two. Read them, and give them back to me."

The first that I opened was on white English paper, in a man's handwriting, upright like print and evidently disguised. It read:—

"MISS WESTERVELT:—

"I write this at the earnest request of my daughter, who is a friend of yours, and who wishes me to interfere between you and the slanders of a certain young man who is in the habit of visiting your country-house. My child has repeated some of these falsehoods to me, while others are of so shocking a nature that she declares she will never utter them to a human being. I will not state a single one of the vile fictions here, because I do not wish to pain you, and also because your character is so pure that you will never find it necessary to contradict them. Your friends will do that for you. But even if the slanders are not worth your notice, the slanderer ought to be punished. Of course, you will simply exclude him from your society, without explaining the reason to him or to any one else. The less said in such matters, the sooner they are over. His name is Fitz Hugh.

"I was about to sign this, but my daughter forbids it. She dreads to have even the shadow of a cloud fall between her

and your friendship. Very unwillingly, therefore, I send you an anonymous letter."

"Miss Westervelt," said I, "I hope that you have not believed one word of this. You cannot have been so hard. I do assure you that it is an utter falsehood. I have not spoken a word against you, and I could not. Don't you believe me?"

She looked me steadily in the eyes, not with suspicion, but with frank earnest kindness, as she replied, "Yes, I do believe you."

"Thank you!" I answered. "And thank you too for not showing it to others. They might have been more uncharitable. Even your father might have felt himself compelled to dismiss me until I could clear myself."

He would have been delighted to do it, I am afraid, was the thought which I did not utter.

"Give me the other letter now," she said. "I do not believe that, either; and there is no use in annoying you with it."

I replied, as I suppose most persons would have done, by begging leave to read it. It was written on pink paper, in a delicate feminine hand, without comma, period, or other punctuation, except italics, after the favorite manner of many young ladies in composing. "Dear Mary," it commenced. "I hope you received dear papa's note of *warning* I made him write it although he *hated* to He *despises* anonymous letters although I don't see why for almost all Valentines are anonymous But I *obliged* him to do it as I told you Indeed it was *high* time. Those dreadful *stories* of Mr Fitz Hugh shame on him had begun to circulate Papa and I have contradicted them *everywhere* Don't be uneasy we will see that they are *put an end to* I hope that you have packed the *creature* off before this I should like to get hold of him and pull him about the room by his hair *a little* You must never know my name *Adieu* dearest darling."

"Have you any friends who write like this?" I questioned.

"Plenty who write in that style, but none in that handwriting. It is uncommonly legible. It makes one think of a schoolmistress."

"Do you know the handwriting of the other letter?"

"How should I? It is disguised, of course."

"And you don't suspect the author of either?"

"No—I do not. I have run over all my acquaintance, and I can't fix upon one who seems likely to send me such things."

"Well, I am innocent. I do assure you that I am. Both these letters are false, altogether."

"I know it. I pledge you my word that I do not suspect you, and have not."

I held out my hand, and she gave me hers, which I pressed so earnestly that it was almost unconsciously. She did not return the pressure, but a soft carnation like the inner tint of a conch-shell mounted to her forehead, and her eyes drooped with a frightened sparkle.

"Now you shall see what I will do with them," she said. "Have you a match?"

I handed her one of those little tin cylinders which a smoker is very apt to carry about him. She unfolded the letters, laid them on the lower stone of the granite steps, applied an allumette, and the scurrilous little sheets were soon cinders, blowing about the garden walks. In the midst of the miniature holocaust, I heard a step behind me, and, turning, saw Somerville at the corner of the house. He nodded amicably to me, surveyed Miss Westervelt's proceedings with the composure and incuriosity becoming a man of the world, and strolled slowly away through the grounds, smoking with the tasteful, innocent placidity of "a scholar, a gentleman, and a Christian."

"And so you have been suspecting me as a slanderous tattler for a fortnight now," I said as Miss Westervelt resumed her seat.

"Not suspecting you. But it is a fortnight since one of the letters reached me; the other came a few days afterward. They were both postmarked in New York, as you saw. So your enemies live there."

"Not necessarily; and not necessarily *enemies*; it is more probably *one* person."

"I thought of that. It is much the most likely. But those reports,—who could have put them in circulation? Perhaps there are none; perhaps it is all a fabrication."

"I do not doubt it. I think that I would not even inquire if there have been reports. The mere question would make silly people suppose that slanders had got out; and then, be sure, slanders would soon be out. No, there is not a shadow of truth in those letters; and the author,—well, I should look for him here rather than in New York."

"You think so!" she exclaimed. "Whom *do* you mean?"

"Did you ever suspect Mrs. Van Leer?" I asked.

"It is not possible," she whispered, shaking her head.

"Jule is lively and almost wild,—no no, I don't mean to say that—but she would not do anything like this,—she is far too good for this. Besides, she is a great friend of yours."

The look which accompanied this last remark would, I now think, have expressed something like grave inquiry if not reproach, had it not been quelled the moment it had wandered to my face; but I did not then color under it nor even notice it distinctly, for my coquetries with Mrs. Van Leer had quite slipped my mind, so earnestly was I occupied with the discoveries of the last half hour.

"Neither do I suspect her," I replied. "She has not a bad heart, and she has no object in injuring either of us. Robert, too, is incapable of such meanness."

"Oh, quite so!" she asseverated, with a warmth which almost provoked me.

"Mr. Hunter is feather-brained enough, but not wicked enough," I went on. "There is no one else but Somerville;—no one but Somerville."

“Do you think it possible?” she asked gravely, doubtfully, yet with no surprise nor reproof in her eyes.

“I do—I do! I don’t wish to be uncharitable, but I suspect that man,—I dread him,—I detest him. I should like never to see his face again.”

She remained silent a moment, while I watched her face anxiously.

“Well, I doubt him also,” she said at last. “In truth I feel a dislike to him that I could hardly justify. I wish that he was away; and he would be ——”

She stopped, for Mrs. Van Leer’s voice and footstep were heard in the entry. An instant more, and the gay, frivolous, soda-water creature came polking into the veranda, and approached us through a whirl of mock courtesies.

“Don’t stop,” said she. “Affairs of state, I suppose. Don’t be silent on my account. I shouldn’t understand them the least in the world. Just go right on at your ease, and settle the concerns of the universe. I would hate to have the earth stand still because I was in the way. Oh well, if you won’t talk, I will. I’m always glad of a chance to throw a few words away;—I have so many of them.”

She sat down in one of the iron chairs, braced her feet against the edge of our settee, and fell to fanning herself. “Mr. Fitz Hugh,” she continued, “how can a person be comfortable these warm mornings. What consolation is there for humanity when the thermometer is up to ninety?”

“Think of the eternal fitness of things and the great laws of nature,” said I. “When I had the gout in a former state of existence, I used to calm myself by meditating on the stupendous truths of astronomy. I found it a most delightful and consolatory thing to consider that the sun is eight hundred and eighty thousand miles in diameter. By the side of this gigantic fact how small one’s great toe appears?”

“Oh, necessarily. However, I don’t seem to get much comfort from the idea that my great toe is a little toe.”

“A lady sometimes draws comfort from the idea that her foot is a little foot,” I remarked.

She thrust out her foot immediately ; it was both small and handsome, and I had often admired it ; but now I would not look at it. Accordingly after a moment, it was withdrawn from sight under its rustling covertures, while a faint shadow of annoyance appeared on the face of its lively owner.

“ Miss Westervelt, won't you go to sketching again ? ” said I. “ I like to watch the work.”

She did as I requested, and I overlooked her, both of us silent. I did not lift my eyes to Mrs. Van Leer, and yet I could see, or rather feel, that she was not at all pleased with this method of managing the interview. Now her feet pushed against the settee ; now they dropped upon the floor and kicked among the embroideries ; now they climbed back to the settee and shook it with their wriggling. She fanned herself violently, she arranged the skirts of her morning-dress, she unfastened and refastened her breastpin, she jerked and twirled her ringlets until they seemed as full of life as the hairs of Medusa. Miss Westervelt stopped sketching once or twice, and at last remonstrated.

“ Julia, is that you joggng the settee so ? You make my leaves look more like geological bird-tracks than anything else.”

“ I'm glad of it,” responds Julia. “ What do you leave me alone in this way for ? Mr. Fitz Hugh, at least, might have the politeness to say something amu—sing.”

“ I have the politeness,” said I, “ but not the ability.”

“ Oh, say a few such things as you said to me when we walked to the Cedars,” she laughed, mischievously. “ I thought them intense—ly diverting.”

I made no answer, and allowed myself to look just as surly as I felt. Puzzled and perhaps bothered by my unexpected severity of countenance, she remained quiet a few moments, and then spoke with all the sweetness of butter and honey. “ Mr. Fitz Hugh, I have heard one thing of you that I hope is not true. Robert told me last evening that you talked of going away. I felt quite sure that he must be mista—ken,—

wasn't he? You certainly would think twice, and a great many times more, I hope, before you would leave us to this dole—ful solitude."

"I was just saying to Miss Westervelt that I had no intention of quitting Pa and Ma Treat."

"Oh, don't talk of it!" said she. "How they would miss you! And Johnny, too! you couldn't of course think of parting with that dear, apple-headed urchin. You ought at least to stay with him till it is perfectly certain that he will have a nose to his face. But, seriously, *we* ought to leave Seacliff. A lady *must* go to Saratoga or somewhere once a year; or she gets forgot—ten, and people consider her *passée*. I would rejoice to start to-morrow."

"Why don't you?" returned I, with the hardest heart in the world.

She looked at me with a semi-defiant expression, which seemed to say, I can be as indifferent as you. "I don't go," she drawled, "sim—ply be—cause Henry wont take me. He would rather catch one shark than attend all the balls of the season."

"You might go to Newport; there he could have his sharks, and you could have your balls."

"I wont go to Newport," she declared. "I hate Newport. There are too many Bostonians there; and they are certainly the most prig—gish, pedan—tic, stuck-up people that I ever saw. They absolutely pretend to look down on New Yorkers. A Bostonian holds his head higher above his shoulders than any other creature on earth, not excepting a cam—el—leopard."

"That's because he wears stand-up collars," said I. "It is surely better than to carry his head under his arms like the Africans of Herodotus, or resting on his collar-bones like the generality of Young America. For my part, I like the Tremont type. It is on the whole the best moral and intellectual man this side of the Atlantic. Let me tell you an anecdote. A friend of mine, a doctor, was walking the pave-

ment of his city close behind a stranger who seemed to have just arrived. The stranger coughed and cleared his throat. Every time that he did so, he stepped to the edge of the sidewalk and spit in the gutter. Most Americans would have expectorated over the pavement, trusting to the next lady's dress to sweep it up. 'That man is a Bostonian,' said my friend to himself. He followed the stranger to his hotel, saw him write his name, stepped up to the book and at the end of the line found the word Boston. Then look at the very collegians,—a class in the imitative age. They take the tone of the city. Harvard dresses better, has better manners, rows a shell-boat faster, and turns out more famous men (as I have heard Boston people say) than any other university in the country."

"Who ever thinks of bringing stu—dents into an argument!" droned Mrs. Van Leer. "It's of no use talking, Mr. Fitz Hugh. If there is anything in the world that I hate thoroughly, it is a Bosto—nian, and espe—cially a Boston la—dy."

"That is beautiful, Miss Westervelt," said I, turning to the sketch, or rather to the sketcher. "I know very little about drawing, but it seems to me that this is fit to engrave from. I envy you this talent, and the use you might make of it. A good sketcher can give so much innocent and enduring pleasure to friends. He or she can strike off a trifle in a few minutes,—a house, a face, a caricature, perhaps,—which will be a lasting memento of some pleasant interview, and will always be treasured by whoever receives it."

"Can't you understand, Mary?" asked Mrs. Van Leer, maliciously. "I never heard such barefaced beggary."

"No, no; he did not mean that," smiled Miss Westervelt. "Besides, he must not ask for it. I have promised it to some one for a special purpose."

She had promised it to some one! Did you hear that, reader? and what did you think of it? I wanted to ask who that some one was, but I dared not, for fear that she

would tell me, and then I might blush or grow pale, and then Mrs. Van Leer would laugh at me. I looked cautiously around, to see if Bob was anywhere near with heaven in his most earthly visage; but he was not visible, and so I stared abstractedly at the sky, as if I cared nothing for things sublunary, or as if the diameter of the sun were my perfect consolation in earthly trials. Before I could think of another remark to make, Mr. Westervelt's feminine accents sounded from within, calling "Mary."

So Mrs. Van Leer and I were left together, she with her feet against my settee, and I with my eyes in the air. It was not my intention to speak again until Miss Westervelt returned; but my companion had something on her mind, or at least on her tongue. She waited about ten seconds for me, and then, finding that I was either stupidly or maliciously wasting time, she shut up her fan and opened her mouth, saying, "You don't seem to feel so—ciable this morning, Mr. Fitz Hugh. I hope you are not melancholy."

"Quite the contrary; never was happier in my life, that I can recollect."

A little pause, and then she asked, pleadingly, "Are you vexed?"

"No, I am *not* vexed," said I, in a most unamiable tone. "What should I be vexed at?"

"I am afraid that I annoyed you by speaking of our walk to the Cedars," she replied, humbly. Then she added, gayly, "Come, you were ve—ry saucy; you must acknowledge that, now. But I forgave you for it there and then; and I have said nothing about it to any one; and I never shall say anything; so don't let it annoy you."

"Oh, Mrs. Van Leer!" I groaned. "Well—you are right. I *was* impertinent and absurd. But I have done with all that. I ask your pardon, sincerely; and I give you my word that you shall never be troubled by any such nonsense from me again."

Had I gained a single step in her good will by this ac-

knowledge, and this promise? I did not expect to, and I certainly had not, as I could see in the quick flame that heated her cheek, and the sulky look of discontent and mortification that followed it. What coquette, married or unmarried, was ever pleased to hear a man repent that he had flirted with her, and declare that he would sin thus no more?

"You are vexed," she said, petulantly. "You are angry with me, and I don't see why, for I have done nothing that you could fairly take offence at."

"No, you have done nothing," I admitted, perfectly willing, however, to quarrel. "And I am not angry with you, nor with any one but myself. I have apologized to you, and will do it again if you demand it."

"I don't want to hear your apologies," she replied, reddening violently. "What do you make them for? They are the greatest insult of all,—so cold-blooded and deliberate, and malicious!"

How strange it was! At the Cedars she was not offended with me, although I showed the manners of a Tom Jones; but now that I begged her pardon for my impertinence, she was so provoked that the tears sparkled among her eye-lashes. I began to pity her, as well as to reflect that a false truce might be less perilous than open warfare. "Oh, Mrs. Van Leer!" I exclaimed; "what can I say to regain your good opinion? You are patient toward the blunders and faults of everybody else; why can't you be forbearing toward mine? Come, it is you who are angry, and not I. Why won't you give me a kind word now?"

"Oh! you are re—ally sorry, then?" she replied, her eyes lighting up and a pleased smile stealing over her lips. "Well, I was not vexed; of course I was not. You are forgiv—en. There!"

She offered me her hand, and I could not avoid taking it in mine; but I did not press it as I had pressed another and prettier hand that morning; and I noticed that she threw

herself back in her seat with a little pout of disappointment. I could hardly help laughing aloud as I thought of the whole scene and its conclusion ; it had been a perfect lover's quarrel in appearance, and yet neither of us was one particle in love with the other. At that moment I heard male lungs hooting, "Fitz Hugh! Fitz Hugh!" and looking round, I saw Bob in the garden, gesturing to me with some such frantic emphasis as if he had the St. Vitus' dance.

"Don't mind him," insinuated Mrs. Van Leer. "Some absurdity, not worth going down stairs to listen to. What is it, Robert?"

But Bob, without stirring from his position under the grape-vines, put his hands, funnel-like, to his mouth and bawled again, "Fitz Hugh! Here! Got something private for you."

Glad to get away from my hail-fellow in petticoats, and fearing too that Bob might blow some awful secret abroad through his improvised speaking-trumpet, I ran down the steps and let him take my arm. As soon as he had got a firm grip, he dragged me away to the edge of the bluff, wearing meanwhile a look of such tragic significance, that I began to question whether he did not mean to make a lover's leap of it, and dignify his male grossness with the poetic end of Sappho. It was to be hoped, at least, that he had not discovered in me a perfidious rival, and that he would not insist upon my gravity to secure for himself additional momentum.

"I say, Fitz Hugh, I've overheard 'em," he broke out, halting at the railing. "I've got to the bottom of the secret. Blast his confounded soul! I wish I dared shoot him."

"Dared shoot whom?"

"Somerville—that rascally, cursed, cheating blackguard of a Somerville!"

"Good!" said I. "I wish you dared. But what has he done?"

"Done! I overheard him talking with Ellen—Mrs. Westervelt."

"You did! Mrs. Westervelt! Oh, you have got to the bottom of it, then!" I exclaimed, as it occurred to me, almost for the first time, that she was the "guilty woman." "But, look here, Robert. This must be hushed up. For Heaven's sake don't say anything; don't spread reports. Just consider that she is your own cousin."

"Oh! *she's* not so much to blame, that I know of," returned Bob. "It's Somerville that I am down upon, chiefly. I'd like to touch off a blast under him, and hoist him as high as a shot tower."

"Of course, — of course, — very naturally," I assented, "Well?"

"Well, I overheard them talking about her," continued Bob.

"About *her*? About *whom*?"

"Mary! Mary Westervelt! Miss Mary Westervelt!" reiterated Bob, enraged at my stupidity. "Of course *her*."

"Oh! That's all, is it? I thought — well, never mind; go on."

"That's all, is it? Well, ain't that enough? Guess you'll think so, when you come to hear what it is," retorted Bob, indignantly.

"Very likely. Let us hear what it is. Go on with your story."

"I will. I'll bide ahead, if you'll keep off the track. You see, Fitz Hugh, I ain't so confounded slow always as they take me to be. I ain't literary nor Frenchified, but I can be as sly sometimes as old Joey Bagstock." (Bob really considered Joey to be a most knowing old gentleman.) "I've suspected Somerville ever since you told me to be on the lookout for him. Well, this morning I was in the parlor, and heard him talking to somebody in Ellen's sitting-room. Thinks I to myself, perhaps he's got Mary in there and is trying to court her. So I slipped up to the door and harked at the keyhole. Sly, wasn't it? Well, it was Cousin Ellen,

that he was palavering to. They were having over something about papers and letters and money, that I couldn't make head nor tail of. Finally he says, Well, if that's all you can do, I must look out for myself, and I shall marry one of the girls, and I shall take Mary. No, says she, for pity's sake take Genevieve; I think Genevieve has been interested in you. The very reason I don't want her, says he. But, says she, I think Mary cares for some one else. (That's me, you know.) So much the better, says Somerville; the more fun in getting her.—Well, that's all I heard, Fitz Hugh. I was so precious mad that I had to go out doors to swear. I tell you I feel like a nest of hornets that the boys have been stoning. I shall let on to Cousin Ellen as soon as I catch her alone; and if I don't whip Somerville before night, it will be because he has whipped me."

I protested against this corporeal plan of operations, on the ground that it might break up the family, would be certain to make a vast deal of talk, and would not be at all pleasing, I felt sure, to Miss Westervelt. He contradicted, exclaimed, argued, and swore, but finally admitted that I was right, and promised to keep the peace.

"Well, what shall I do then?" said he. "For pity's sake, Fitz Hugh, stay here and advise a feller. Don't go away till Somerville does, I beg of you. Just stick by here, old feller, won't you now?—on *my* account!"

On *his* account! As I promised him that I would remain, I felt horribly like a hypocrite, notwithstanding my mental reservation that it was purely and simply on my own account.

The rest of that day was chiefly spent in thinking with rage and self-contempt of the benediction which I had pronounced, a fortnight before, on Bob's nuptial intentions. For and against I repeatedly discussed the old question whether I was an idiot or not, hoping meekly that it was not so, and yet obliged to admit that it looked exceedingly probable, inasmuch as I had suffered myself to be most simply duped

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appearances. I came to the conclusion
Lies is the master of appearances in this
world confines itself to realities. Hence that
truth, so notorious and so universally con-
fessions are deceitful; and hence also that
and sustaining truth, that facts are facts,
and always will be.





CHAPTER XXII.

TWILIGHT DIALOGUES.

AFTER tea, as dusk came on, I observed Somerville walking slowly to and fro with Mrs. Westervelt, behind a clump of hemlocks in the most retired corner of the Sencliff grounds.

It suddenly occurred to me that I had not exchanged a word with him during the day, and that he had carefully avoided my presence ever since he accidentally became a spectator of the destruction of those villainous letters. I resolved that I would face him then, and see whether I could not burn at least one blush into his cheek. It seemed more likely that I should inflict this mild punishment upon him if I surprised him in his confidences with Mrs. Westervelt; and therefore I took a circuitous route toward the hemlocks, advancing with the caution of a deerstalker, and always keeping some thicket between me and my goal. I did not intend to play peeping Tom, but to come upon them so suddenly that they could neither have time to separate, nor to glaze their faces into non-expression.

The only result of my stealthy march was to give a start to Mrs. Westervelt. She had sat down desperately on the grass, her head bent with such a weary, hopeless air, as if it could nevermore be lifted, her left hand clutched hard upon her knee, her right grasping one of the little hemlock branches and beating it against the earth. Somerville had vanished, and I could not even hear the sound of receding

footsteps. As I entered the little shadowy alcove, Mrs. Westervelt rose up, looking so guilty and timorous that it seemed as if I should only have to stand silent before her to drive her to confession. But the moment I spoke she recovered; the habits of social intercourse resumed their movement; the trained smile of the world came out on her pale lips; and she simpered with her usual soft insipidity. "Dear me, Mr. Fitz Hugh! You surprised me, really."

"I beg your pardon. I expected to surprise some one else," said I, not much caring how she understood me.

"Oh! you thought the geirls were here," she replied, glancing about her uneasily. "It is one of their favorite spots."

I might as well talk of the girls as of anything else. The subject was interesting at all times, and loomed up momentous now that I suddenly recollected Somerville's declared intention of marrying one of them. I was very grave;—I moralized earnestly;—I had much to say of a mother's duty. It was annoying to hear Mrs. Westervelt's easy commonplace admission of her responsibilities, and to see what a low idea she had formed of their nature.

"O! I am by no means the mother to them that I ought to be," she sighed, as unmeaningly as the wind. "It is my duty to see them launched properly. Really, I haven't the strength of mind to do it. You men, Mr. Fitz Hugh, have no idea what a difficult and delicate job it is to manage a geirl's *début*."

Yes, in her eyes a mother was a chaperone, a sort of matrimonial agent, and nothing more.

"There is my fine old friend, Mrs. Ottoman, is a perfect model," she continued. "She really makes a conscience of it, now. She has married off two of her daughters splendidly, and she is getting the most magnificent offers for the third. Josephine is a great belle already, although she is only eighteen, and there are plenty of handsomer geirls. But her mother drills her most faithfully. Why, in New York, last season, Josey often went to two and three balls a night

without fading at all. Her mother used to hurry her home from one crush, give her a cold bath and frictions, and then drive away with her to another, and so on till daylight. And through all this the good old lady never left her, although she had the gout and was ready to drop. I never knew such devotion. Dear me! I am quite incapable of it. Now Mary ought to be going through something of that sort. Isn't it a shame that I am so idle and careless of my duties? Now don't say a word. It is, really."

I could not resist the vindictive temptation of letting slip a word of bitter satire.

"You give the girls an example of the domestic virtues, Mrs. Westervelt."

"Do I? How you flatter, Mr. Fitz Hugh!" said she, while the troubled, weary look settled down upon her face. "I should like to think that you are in earnest. Well," she added, sadly, "I do as well as I can. I wish I could do better."

Then, looking up suddenly, as if fearful that she had betrayed her secret, she observed, "I suppose you refer to my living so contentedly in the country. To be frank, it is a trial; but then I try to make no complaint. Mr. Westervelt prefers to reside here, and I of course do not say a word, although I am sometimes positively dying for a good New York crush. You can't imagine how I enjoy dancing, Mr. Fitz Hugh," she continued, her face lighting up at the idea, and her foot patting the earth as if about starting off in a polka. "Oh, polking and waltzing! ta ra la, ta ra la; it's delicious, it's heavenly! But my fancy dances were over, you know, on the day that I married. It is a positive fact that I have done nothing but quadrilles and lancers ever since. That is leading an innocent life, isn't it? ha ha ha."

"The thought of it must be a great consolation to you," I said, hardly trying to cover my irony with a smile.

"Do you know," she observed presently, "I wish now that I had cultivated a taste for reading, when I was at school.

I shall always blame Madame Duval severely for not teaching me that. I can't read, I declare! And yet at school I used to write pretty good compositions. They made me do them, you know. I was drilled at it till I actually hated the sight of pens and paper. My only consolation for it was *billets doux*. Oh, the number of love-letters that we silly girls used to get up at Madame Duval's, and throw out to the fellows! Sometimes it seems to me that I could write an amusing book about those days. But reading is another thing. Your book there is the only one that I have read clear through, for a long while. The funny parts, and what you say about the *fêtes*, and the courts, and the balls, and the nobility,—all that is delicious. But I can't understand how you can admire scenery and sunsets so much. Now sunsets tire me; that is, I can't bear to have people drag me off to look at them; of course I don't object to the sun's setting, ha ha ha! It would be useless, I suppose, if I did."

Was it not too bad that such a simpleton could make sensible people wretched? But so it is: the weakest can pile mountains of misery; the stupidest have ingenuity enough to destroy. Yet as I looked at the unhappy woman, I felt more pity for her than disgust or anger. What should I myself have been ere this if circumstances had enabled or forced me to live out my full nature? Many a man walks through life surrounded by loving faces and blest with the approbation of even those who do not know him, simply because but a part of his inward being has been called to act outwardly. Many a man brags of his virtues, who only has a right to be thankful for his exemption from temptation. The wise man admits that below all his fair daily life there is a dark abyss, which he himself cannot fathom, and which he humbly prays may not be made manifest, nor allowed to overbrim in deeds. He never looks into it but that he trembles at the wicked capabilities that he sees there; trembles to think how easily he might become an enemy of society, an infidel, a libertine, a murderer. Accord-

ingly, as I stood gazing at Mrs. Westervelt, I had no desire to cast the first stone at her.

I understood now what it was that had made me study that insipidly pleasing face so often. I saw the meaning of that heavy-burdened air of her quiet moments, which alternated so strangely with her somewhat hoydenish gayety when excited by a sudden overcoming pleasure, and contrasted so utterly with her youthful reputation as a frivolous fashionable belle. I called up, as well as I could, her days of frolic, and remembered, as I thought, that they had occurred mostly in the absences of Somerville. Once or twice she had made me the confidant of some vague sorrow. She was melancholy; she did not care to live long; it was a world of disappointments: a few low-spirited commonplaces, in short; just such things as one hears from a romantic school miss. At the same time she nervously added that she had no particular cause of unhappiness; her husband was perfect, and the children (dear geirls!) were beautiful and amiable; she had a great many friends, and country life was delightful.

Now I comprehended it all. But had any other person sounded the mystery? Mr. Westervelt may have suspected some evil thing, for I had often seen him eye Somerville with timid doubt and dislike; but he could not have known what I knew, or he would not have suffered this man nor this woman to remain under his roof. Absorbed in business and frequently away from home, he was necessarily purblind to much that passed in his family. Correct in life, passionless in temperament, and no longer young, he would not readily accuse others of falling before a temptation which to him was no temptation. No, he knew nothing, and I dared tell him nothing.

Mary Westervelt? If she was aware of the secret, she had never betrayed her knowledge. I had seen her, sometimes sad, sometimes watchful, but never so much so as to excite suspicion in one who did not already suspect. If the

household phantom haunted her, she was a brave girl who would look upon it without letting others doubt that she saw or saw anything which they did not.

Genevieve? Ah, this child had either seen more, or was so capable of self-repression. That she was not altogether conscious of the presence of the spectre appeared, I now might, in her sullen fits, her sarcasms, and all the desultory rhapsody which she had carried on with the peace of the family. I felt that I must forgive her for that happy faculty, *curiosa felicitas*,—which she had shown in making her best ends unhappy, and which, without such cause, would have impeded hers as a vulgar nature. She possessed a trifle of her grandfather's unpleasant talent for hating; but she had certainly found an object which made its exercise almost a Christian duty. There was something cunning and prudent, too, in her. Once, when her father ventured very meekly to prove her spirit of contradiction, she made a reply which must have been but a clever blind to her real feelings.

"I know it is wrong to be snappish, papa. But I can't help thinking that this would be an awfully stupid world if we all thought alike and acted alike. There would be no excitement,—nothing to talk about. We should be yawning from morning till night. One would get fearfully tired of living here. Death would be welcome, suicide common. Don't you think so, papa?"

The Van Leers and Hunter? Imbeciles all, after different manners. They saw nothing, probably; and if they did, much the worse.

I thought them all over while Mrs. Westervelt talked, and when I went back to the mystery itself. It reminded me of that brazen bottle in the Arabian Nights, out of which proceeded a smoke that spread until it became a great cloud, and then slowly gathered into the form of a monstrous and menacing Afreet. Gradually it had arisen from the family before my eyes, at first uncertain and almost ludicrous in seeming, but daily taking shape and becoming more threaten-

ing, until at last it was a sure and defined horror. It had thus far, indeed, wrought no visible results, and for a time longer it might continue dumb and deedless; but it was ever present, stalking darkly behind the other events of our existence like a ghost treading in the steps of living men; and some day, any day, refusing longer to follow us, it might turn and beckon some of us to follow it through lives of shame to graves of sorrow.

I had scarcely got clear of Mrs. Westervelt when I fell in with Hunter, smoking along the garden, and glancing at the stars with the air of one who knows that he outshines them all.

“Can you tell me where Somerville is?” I inquired.

“I am sorry to say not, my dear fellah. I was just looking for our Admirable Crichton, myself. I wanted one more hour with that brilliant intellect. I am off to-morrow, Fitz Hugh. That blue-stockinged Calypso, Alma Mater, calls me once more to her venerable bosom. I assure you, sir, that I almost regret it. I shall miss these charmed hours,—your company, my friend,—my cousins,—my sister. But more than all,—I trust that you will neither be annoyed nor surprised at it,—I shall miss Somerville. What a mind! Copious and shining as a great river under the cloudless sun of the tropics! Colossal and precious as the gold and ivory Jupiter of Phidias! Then, too, the simple and common sense observations, the instructive experiences, which he can mingle with his loftier converse! Why, let me give you an idea of his tact and cleverness, Fitz Hugh. I was talking to him the other day about those matrimonial engagements that I had got into with certain damsels who live within easy walk of our classic sanctuary. Says I, ‘I wonder you never got caught that way, old fellah.’ (Hunter never did call him ‘old fellah;’ always addressed him reverentially, if not flatteringly.) “Well, upon that, he admitted that he hadn’t always escaped the girls. He got lasso’d once; it’s a solemn fact, I pledge my word; and then he wanted to get away. The

trick that he hit upon was the cleverest thing that I ever heard of; a perfect stroke of genius, I assure you; try it myself as soon as I get back to college. He was staying at Saratoga in the same hotel with the girl and her father. Well, sir, he just got beastly drunk in the street, and had to be carried to his room by the porters. The girl cried and wanted to forgive him; but papa wouldn't stand it, and the engagement was a flunk. Says I, 'Somerville, give me your hand, old fellah; I owe you a box of cigars for that idea.'

Will the reader please to remember that in a previous interview Hunter claimed this swinish trick, so unlike the style of Somerville, as his own conception.

"Keep owing it; don't pay it," I counselled. "The lesson isn't worth the box; much less the long nines."

"Don't agree with you, Fitz Hugh," responded Hunter. "If you were harnessed in with the women as I am at —, you would see the thing as I do, and be glad of learning how to kick out of the traces, unless you are more of a Fresh than I take you to be."

"It's lucky that you are going away, Hunter," said I. "You pretend to be an awfully wicked person; but I am afraid that Somerville really is one. Your moral education is in bad hands here, my young innocent."

"Now look here, Fitz Hugh," he exclaimed, walking up and down jauntily, after his usual fashion when the inspiration of balderdash came upon him, "I shall pass over your slur at my sincerity, not because it is just, but because I am magnanimous. But I cannot allow you to live and die in the mistaken supposition that *savoir vivre* is wickedness. Somerville, sir, knows life; he is an incomparable analyst of society; he is a man of the world in the largest sense of that large phrase; he has studied his specialty with a subtlety and originality which give him claim to the word Genius! As a discoverer of truths I consider him superior to Humboldt. His field of research is nobler; he has to do, not with matter but mind; not with physical truths but moral truths."

"Immoral," I suggested, as Hunter stopped to send a breath of life through his dying cigar.

"Well, immoral, if you please; but truths at all events, and practical ones. I have learned far more from his conversation than from all the lectures of all the professors of Alma Mater."

"Don't I know it?" said I.

"Quit that. Fitz Hugh. I shall graduate yet. Besides, it was the slough of rum and water which arrested my progress, and not the stumbling-stones of the hill of science. But let us return to our muttuns. What are Latin and Greek worth to me, practically, compared with a knowledge of men and manners? Yes, women and manners, by Jove! Somerville teaches me living life. The professors teach me dead life, or rather the dead tongues of dead life. The only result of this species of much learning is to make me mad. I swear, I never see a bust of Cicero but what I want to knock his old Roman nose off. Catiline and Messalina be hanged! What I want to know is how to rule the bad men and manage the naughty women of the present day. You can't deny that Somerville knows women. He has analyzed the sex all through its varieties, from ugliness to beauty, from juicy sixteen to the dryness of old maidenhood. On this subject, Fitz Hugh, I have received lessons of gold from Somerville."

"I can guess what they are. But where is the value of them? What practical use can you put them to, that will not subject you to contempt and remorse?"

"Contempt and remorse!" scoffed Hunter, strutting about as if bearing mountains of both without the least inconvenience, and quite forgetful of the anguish which the gossips of Rockford had lately caused him. "Contempt is a chimera, my friend, which only exists to the coward. As for remorse, that is insanity or indigestion. Not even a murderer suffers remorse as long as his mind and body are in a healthy state. I am quoting Somerville, by the way. Give me credit for a

soul above plagiarism.—Well, old Time is still a flying, and I must not trifle with his venerated pinions. I must have one more talk with Somerville, and then pack my trunk. See you again to-morrow, before I leave.”

It is distinctly visible, I suppose, that Hunter was afflicted with moral blockheadism. Perhaps it is a disease common to adolescence; perhaps some of the conditions of college life tend to develop it with unusual vigor; but Hunter would have been pretty nearly such as he was, no matter what his age or surroundings. He was delighted to get back to his class, notwithstanding Cicero and Catiline. The ludicrous disgrace of the Capers' adventure had driven him from his haunts in Rockford; and he was ill at ease at Seaclyff, where the Westervelts of late turned to him a cold shoulder. They must have heard of his lies about the young ladies, and the only wonder was that they did not resent them still more sternly. Thus he fizzed out from among us quietly, like a Chinese cracker lighted at the wrong end; so quietly that I was disappointed, for I had expected to see such an odd firework go off with some notable explosion. What his social scintillations were at ——— will doubtless be known when the history of college beaux and college belles comes to be written.

To me Somerville never talked himself out freely, as he did to Hunter, if we may believe that mendacious creature; therefore it is that I so seldom relate his agreeable conversations, for I am puzzled how to report him without conveying a false impression of him. Do you remember the astonishment of a famous ornithologist, when, after finding bird after bird slaughtered in his aviary, he at last discovered that his sweetest songster, the mocking-bird, was the assassin? He would hardly believe that the same bill could chant so mellowly and tear so murderously. No, there was nothing characteristic in Somerville's words; they were like the reflections of stars in a quiet lake; they expressed what was outward and foreign, not what was inward and native.

I ceased my pursuit of the man when I came upon Miss Westervelt sitting alone in the veranda.

"Have you seen him?" I asked, not so much because I still wished to find him as for the sake of commencing a conversation.

"Who? Mr. Somerville? Not since tea. But I hope that you are not going to speak to him about those letters."

"You think I had best not, then? Well, I believe it is my own opinion, also. In fact the interest that I take in my unknown traducer amounts to nothing more than a little venomous curiosity. The subject is a squeamishly nice one to approach, and I suppose that the better way is to keep hands off it."

In truth the anonymous assaults upon my character seemed to me a mere trifle, almost a joke, compared with the other doings of the evil one who troubled Seacliff.

"But how can it be possible! How could he do such a mean thing when he appears to be so refined and noble!" she said presently. "His manner is always gentlemanly."

"A mere frozen surface, Miss Westervelt. It has no more union with his real self than the ice on a river has with the current beneath; it is not governed by the same laws, doesn't move with it, nor show its direction. I suppose that we are all of us more or less skinned over;—I suppose that we never exhibit ourselves thoroughly except in some freshet of excitement. But I never saw any other person so smoothly and solidly congealed as Somerville. He beats the very animals. No fox ever formed such a surface; no cat was ever so shod with velvet. I wish that he would forget his mask just for once, so that we could really see him."

She looked up at me earnestly as if she were about to make some frank avowal; to utter, perhaps, her true judgment of Somerville, or even to speak out concerning the mystery. Then a suggestion of prudence, or a start of womanly timidity checked her, and her eyes wandered while she answered me as if she were seeking words far away from her heart.

"It is a dazzling quality,—this fine varnish,—this enamel of character," she said. "It is almost worth one's envy. Of course it is not a virtue; and yet it sometimes does the work of a virtue."

"I don't give much moral or intellectual credit to Somerville for possessing it," returned I, unable to bear a word which seemed to favor the man. "He could hardly help it; it came to him by the accident of birth and breeding; he inherited it from his parents, and caught it from his earliest intimates."

"You give him no kind of credit," she observed, trying to smile, as if she did not know that our conversation was a painfully serious one.

"Yes I do;—I give him credit for a miracle. It is impossible to get two men into one skin; to unite the soul of a finished rascal with the bearing of a finished gentleman; but it seems to me that he has done it. In public he is the blandest and gentlest of creatures, whose mere demeanor is soothing, whose voice mellow's yours as he speaks to you, who hurts no one and nothing, not even vanity. But in secret,—oh, depend upon it that his only earnest words and deeds are in secret. Elegant breeding sends the whole of a man's cream to the surface; but so much the worse for what is below; I mean in this case."

She grew sad and silent over the subject, and I presently dropped it for fear of annoying her. There was another on which I could have talked quite as fluently and passionately if I had dared, and that was the state of my feelings toward herself. When I was at Naples, standing in one of the halls of the gigantic Museo Borbonico, I saw an English girl of about eighteen, staid, quaint, and Jane Eyreish in aspect, step up to an antique copy of that beautiful boy-bust known as the Young Augustus, kiss its forehead, and then walk quietly away without glancing around her to see whether or not that strange action had been noticed by the loiterers whose footsteps echoed down the long galleries. Just so would I have

been glad to do by Miss Westervelt during the week which followed my discovery of her in that fatal dress of autumn colors. Could I have found her asleep, so that, I might, unseen, have dropped a kiss, unfelt, upon that fair forehead, I would have done it, and then left her forever, nor thought of her more except as so much marble. So it seemed, at least; although so it probably would not have been. But now all that was over: she was not a cold bust in one of memory's coldest galleries; she was as near, as human, as womanly, as when she thanked me for saving her life.

Who has not felt at times that a single word or incident has changed him forever, so that, whether for better or worse, he can never more be the man that he has been? And yet only a week has gone by, or perhaps not so much, when he finds that the primal familiar nature has risen from the flood of strange emotion that had submerged it seemingly for all time. Humanity is somewhat like the face of an india-rubber doll: you may pinch and pull it into the most grotesque grimaces; but remove the pressure, and lo the old Adam! My suspicions of Miss Westervelt and my flirtation with Mrs. Van Leer had distorted me from my usual nature for a few days, and then had passed suddenly away, leaving no impress nor sign upon me. I cared as much for the first, and as little for the last, as I had done a fortnight before.

"You will promise me a favor?" she asked as I rose to leave her.

"But what is it," I returned, although I knew perfectly well that I should promise, whatever it might be.

"You will not speak to Mr. Somerville about those letters?"

"Do you wish him so well?" inquired I, curious to learn her reasons for the request.

"No. But why should I wish you any ill? If you should charge him with it, and there should be a difficulty, I should always blame myself as the cause. Perhaps I ought not to have shown them to you."

"I promise," said I, delightfully flattered with the idea that she was anxious on my account. "And now a favor in return. I want you to distrust this man; yes, I want you to detest him."

"How earnest you are!" she replied, half smiling. "It is hard work to hate people. I am afraid that I shall do it in this case, however; that is, unless ——"

"I beg your pardon," said a mellow voice behind us. "Excuse me, Miss Westervelt, for interrupting you; but I thought that you were about to say something meant for Mr. Fitz Hugh alone."

She bowed, colored, smiled faintly, and hastened into the house without speaking.

"Good-night, Mr. Somerville," I muttered, turning homeward.

"So early, Fitz Hugh? Good-night, then," he answered in his friendliest manner.

How much had he heard? I am sure that I did not care. I only wished that he would quarrel with me.





CHAPTER XXIII.

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

CALLING at Seacliff next morning, I found Somerville, but not alone. There was 'no guilt, no shame, no anger in his eyes as they met mine, but only a swift flash of inquiry, which softened instantly to a look of friendly recognition and interest.

"We were talking of American society, Mr. Fitz Hugh," said he. "I was just observing that the great fault of our national character is not so much downright vice as incompleteness. The fruit is not rotten, it is only green."

"I think," observed I, "that the worst possible man is a green American who has got rotten in Europe."

My sarcasm, angrily as I had flung it, did not enter him, but skimmed the shining surface of his self-possession, as a pebble skims ice, without rippling the current below.

"I quite agree with you," he blandly answered. "A creature who is at once coarse and corrupt, is thoroughly useless to humanity, not to say injurious. A gentleman in manners, on the contrary, no matter how vicious, is a civilizer. He teaches people to be clean, to be tasteful, to speak good grammar, to avoid indecorums, and so on. An importation of Chesterfields or even of Brummels, would be an immense benefit to our society of hoydens and counter-jumpers."

His proposition was startling, but to some extent correct. His own influence at Seacliff was what he had just described, eminently civilizing. Much as some of us disliked him,

much as all of us may have suspected him, a silent impulse emanated from his walk and conversation, which refined us externally, and made us seem, like him, better than we were. In consequence of him Cousin Jule was less hoydenish than her nature, the Van Leers less boorish, and Hunter less conceitedly pert. Great is urbanity, great is decorum, and almost worthy of being classed among the moralities.

Let us not, however, accord Somerville too much admiration for his philosophy, considering that we had read it all, ten days before, and doubtless he also, in an editorial of the New York Censor. Behold another peculiarity of this ingenious, this elaborate man of society. He quoted without quotation marks, and made use of an author while cruelly denying him an existence. His conversation was infused with all the literary ideas of the day; his dinner-table efforts smacked of poems, novels, histories, dailies, monthlies, quarterlies, encyclopædias; and yet he constantly admitted and lamented that he was no reader, thereby gaining vast reputation among unbooked people, for originality and fecundity of thought. How often have I enjoyed a malicious pleasure in hearing the maxims of Rochefoucauld and the jokes of Voltaire fall from his artless lips! He was a brilliant man, however, notwithstanding that he was such a sham; and you could not really despise him, even after you had discovered all his tricks.

"I doubt whether we shall ever have a truly elegant society in our republic," he continued. "Caste is impossible in a country which does not admit of eldest sons; and you can no more have gentility without caste, than you can have music without a scale."

"Oh, but we *have* caste, Mr. Somerville," observed Mrs. Van Leer, rustling her patrician silks. "I am sure the grades of New York society are ve—ry distinctly marked. Don't you think Fifth Avenue aristocratic?"

"Whenever Mrs. Van Leer walks there," bowed Somerville, with a smile of jest strongly infused with flattery.

The lady bridled, wriggled, and simpered her gratitude. "But it is *so* amusing sometimes to get among people of another set," she added with a giggle.

"Do you mean a lower set?" inquired I, maliciously.

"Of course!" she replied, frowning at the hint that there could be a higher one than her own. "I mean ordinary sort of people, you know. How ve—ry divert—ing to watch them!"

"Exactly," sneered Genevieve; "to see them in all their diversity of form and color; such monstrous, unnatural, outlandish creatures; things with three legs—four—ten—perfect centipedes; women with heads under their arms; men who bow-wow instead of talking; that's the kind you mean, isn't it, Cousin Jule? Precisely; ordinary sort of folks; people who are not of our set."

Genevieve was born an iconoclast, and delighted in grinding golden calves to powder. Wherever she found an altar of vanity, no matter in whose heart erected, or to what mighty name inscribed, she fell to upsetting it with an energy which was only redoubled by the anguish and the pious resistance of its votary. The sentiment was partly, no doubt, an honest indignation at shams, but partly too, I fear, pugnacity and pleasure in satire. Fortunate for the interests of truth is it that such natures are born into the world; but it must be confessed that they are not the most agreeable persons to have always about one; that they seem far better adapted to converting obstinate cannibals than to making civilized people happy. There are times when even optimists and perfectionists are tempted to believe that humanity is, to say the least, badly assorted. One relative, one intimate, brings constant supplies of peace and joy to your soul, while another is a blessing to you only when you consider him or her in the light of a reproving and humbling judgment. For my part, I am not one of those who rejoice in such godsend. Left to myself, I would accept the risk of dispensing with them, and would cheerfully see them be-

stowed on the ends of the earth and the isles of the sea. Often have I wished of some of my unconquerable friends, that they would take a fancy to New Zealand or the Marquesas; wished it, I am not ashamed to say, less for the spiritual good of the tattooed populations than for my own temporal comfort. Besides, their presence would be relished there, and cannibalism would prosper on their good qualities. In fact, it would afford me a sneaking kind of pleasure to hear of several excellent persons whom I can't bear, that they had come as near as possible to being entertainment for man and beast; and even supposing them actually served up for a roast or a chowder, I am afraid that I could hardly bring myself to dissent from the universal New Zealand verdict of, Served them right.

Somerville answered Genevieve in a way that was characteristic of him. "It is hopeless," said he, with a sigh and a smile; "we shall never have an aristocracy; the very persons who should constitute it ridicule it."

No thanks, not even a look, did he get for his compliment. Genevieve only pouted her lips and gave a vindictive toss to her handsome head, as she muttered, "The very persons who should constitute it, disgrace it."

"You ought to pardon a fallen adversary," said Somerville, with a quizzical affectation of humility.

"Not necessarily. The devil is a fallen adversary. We are not bound to pardon him, I suppose."

"Why, Genevieve! you are awfully personal," laughed Mrs. Van Leer. "You ought to have said that you didn't refer to Mr. Somerville, instead of going on to make odious comparisons."

"I am not at all personal," retorted the satirist. "It is not personality to throw a fools-cap on the floor. Nobody is obliged to pick it up."

"No, it is not personality; it is legitimate satire," observed Somerville, blandly. "Miss Genevieve deserves commendation for the make up of her fools-caps, and the case

with which she pitches them out. I admire them so much that I should be only too proud to find one that fitted me."

He had not once put up the calm smile that he wore as a vizor, nor shown in any way that he seriously took her sarcasms as referring to himself. She looked as if she could cry with rage at the failure of her attack; but his smooth impudence had beaten her, and she said nothing more to him.

"Jenny, you are cut out for an old maid," observed Cousin Jule. "I never knew a satirical girl that had an offer."

"Well, what matter?" replied Genevieve, with a forced gayety which did not hide how much she had been badgered. "I suppose that most girls would rather die young than be old maids. It is different with me. I would rather be an old maid than take a man I did not want. No, it is not exactly that, either. I would rather die young than not have the man of my choice."

"I am sure it will not be the fault of our sex if you meet with an early death," said Somerville, bowing in the very humility of gallantry.

At this compliment Genevieve was furiously provoked, although speechlessly. It would have been laughable to see her eyes sparkle so, had I not known all the while that she was raging at the spectral presence of the family mystery.

Presently Mrs. Westervelt looked into the room and beckoned to Jenny. "Come, dear," said she. "Come, Robert. Mr. Fitz Hugh, excuse us; we have an errand to do. You will join us afterwards in boating, I hope."

Genevieve and Robert followed her; and we heard carriage wheels roll away.

Somerville turned to Miss Westervelt and began to prate pictures, a subject for which she had a passion, and with which accordingly he often angled for her attention.

One secret of this man's social success was, that he had a cameleon-like mind, and could suit his tastes to his company.

He talked dress with Mrs. Westervelt, stocks with her husband, coquetry with Cousin Jule, fishing and horses with the Van Leer brothers, books with me, and handled each subject cleverly, tastefully, and, to all appearance, zestfully. He could throw himself into the idiosyncrasy of each of us with a power which was seemingly greater than that of his interlocutor, and so could delight and influence us easily, at least until we had learned to fathom and hate him. This adaptability is a wonderful means to popularity, and its superficial gilt passes better in society than the solid ore of real genius. Had I known Somerville when I was several years younger, I should probably have been completely fascinated by him; and so in truth I might have been as it was, had he not come across my path as a rival and an enemy. No genius, I say again, but a creature of extraordinary talents, who, had he been moved by a noble ambition, might have achieved high honors and wide respect.

While he talked to Miss Westervelt, and I speculated in silence whether he had overheard our last evening's conversation concerning him, and whether he would try to punish us for it, Mrs. Van Leer, finding herself neglected, fretted like a lapdog which is not caressed to its liking. She went out and came in again; took up a book and pretended to read; threw it down and pouted undisguisedly.

"Come, Mr. Fitz Hugh, let us quit these æsthetic people," she said at last. "I vote that you and I take a prosaic stroll in the garden. I don't feel myself fit company for persons who talk blank verse."

"No no, Cousin Jule! stay here," commanded Mary. "I don't approve this pairing off. If you go, I shall go with you."

Quitting Somerville in the middle of a sentence, she came across the room, sewing-work in hand, and took an ottoman between Mrs. Van Leer and myself. There was nothing in the man's face which showed that he felt vexed at the slight, or that it reminded him of any promise which had been made

to distrust and detest him. His eye followed her tranquilly, and then he addressed Mrs. Van Leer with a smile of amiable badinage.

"Miss Westervelt has deprived Mr. Fitz Hugh of a great pleasure."

"Do you hear that?" laughed the gay lady. "Mr. Somerville has a proper appreciation of my society. Do you understand, Mr. Fitz Hugh?"

I looked non-comprehension with all my might.

"Why, what a short mem—ory you have!" she continued. "I'm sure that I heard a lady propose to you only a minute ago, to take a walk with her in the gar—den."

"Indeed!" said I. "Well, I think I must have declined on account of the heat. What other reason could there be?"

"Oh! oh!" she replied in a pet. "How very thoughtful of your complex—ion! Well, perhaps you were not invited after all; in fact, I don't think you were, except merely to see if you had any gallantry. It is perfectly aw—ful to see how the gallantry of an American gentleman dies away if he once visits Europe. Mr. Somerville is only an excep—tion to the rule. There is Robert, now, who has never been out of America, has ten times the devotion of Mr. Fitz Hugh. Don't you think so, Mary? Don't you think he is a model of fidelity, self-sacrifice, and all that sort of thing? *You* ought to acknowledge it, of all persons. Come, do speak, and give the poor boy his dues."

Miss Westervelt colored deeply, tried to cover her embarrassment by laughing, and stammered out, "How can you, Jule! He is not a Bayard, but he is a kind, good-hearted cousin. You ought to be ashamed if you are laughing at him."

"I am *not* laugh—ing at him. I admire him. Such a faith—ful, whole-souled fellow! I wish *I* had a cavalier as devo—ted."

"So you have, Jule," said Mary, half reproachfully. "You have your husband, who is every whit as good as Robert."

"Oh! I for—got that I was married," replied the coquette. "Exact—ly! Henry is a good fellow, too. I ought to look him up now."

"If you want to know where he is," said I mischievously, "he is in the garden. You will find him under the lilacs."

She gave me a glance of indignation, and marched directly out of the room.

Somerville caught her parting look, and came over to me with a face of mock expostulation so varnished with smiles that you could hardly see its insolence.

"My dear Mr. Fitz Hugh!—excuse me if I remonstrate."

"What is the matter?" said I, with a poor affectation of not perceiving his meaning.

"First, allow me to congratulate you on your *belle fortune*," he continued pretending to speak low, but making himself plainly audible to Miss Westervelt.

"I don't understand you," said I, trying in my desperation to browbeat him into silence with a wrathful stare.

"But it is a very great pity that she is married," he persisted, still smiling.—"Married, if not mated."

"I don't see, sir—the point—what does this mean, Mr. Somerville?" I answered, stammering as a young fellow is apt to do when he is choked by a guilty conscience. "Do you allude to Mrs. Van Leer?"

"To Mrs. Van Leer?" he repeated with a momentary show of his teeth. "Oh! perhaps we have made a discovery. Is that the way your conscience points? But, really," (in a wicked whisper,) "have you thought of her husband?"

Miss Westervelt, whose face was burning red by this time, suddenly started up as if about to leave the room. A second thought checked her; perhaps she feared that if left to ourselves we would come to blows; she stepped to the window and gazed steadily out of it, with the air of being far away from a conversation, which to her was an insult. I rose also, and turned my back on Somerville, knowing full well that if I looked him in the face I should strike him. Yet my anger

was almost confounded by my amazement; for, while such a coarse and brutal attack was stupefying enough in itself, it was doubly so coming from a man who had hitherto been our great exemplar of courtesy, and between whom and myself there had been no quarrel, nor even any ground of quarrel which might be uttered. He had not insulted me, I knew, in awkwardness, or in a sudden flurry of passion, but as consciously and deliberately as if he had taken a wager to do it. Let me render him full justice while I am about it. I have no doubt that it grated on his gentlemanly feelings to utter such questionable innuendoes in the presence of a modest girl, and that he would have avoided them if he could have gained his ends otherwise. But necessity is a hard master, and even a Somerville must sometimes make his better nature bend to it. After glancing at his unfinished plans, and weighing nicely every probability which would go to make or spoil them, he felt himself forced to attack my character before Miss Westervelt, and he did it with regret and a smile. What he had said would have been nothing to a good conscience, sound in wind and limb; but mine, alas! had shaky knees, and could hardly stand up against an insinuation weighted with the name of Mrs. Van Leer. With what an enraged repentance I cursed all my silly flirtation with that woman, and how virtuously I resolved to avoid in future even the appearance of evil!

It was Bob Van Leer who broke that moment of insupportable silence; and I blessed him for the interruption, little thinking that I should soon be tempted to trump my benison with a malediction.

"Hullo! Somerville!" he roared, from somewhere out by the garden gate. "I say, Somerville! Come along. The ladies are down to the boat waiting for you,"

"Excuse me," said our Chesterfield. "Mr. Van Leer and I are to do the rowing. You go, I believe, Miss Westervelt."

"I have a headache," she replied, without looking at him. "Tell them not to wait for me."

He walked out while I was hesitating whether I should murder him immediately or on some subsequent occasion. Then words, which I could not perhaps have spoken, trembled in my throat, and I turned to Miss Westervelt almost resolved to plead my case boldly with her, and to pray that she would not condemn me out of the mouth of Somerville. But I had no time to address her, for Bob suddenly loomed in one of the windows opening on the veranda, a blush as big as a bonfire blazing up on his broad cheek, as he put his head between the curtains, stared earnestly at my companion, surveyed every corner of the room with irresolute troubled eyes, and finally set to winking at me nervously. Puzzled and somewhat startled by these evidences of extraordinary excitement, I hurried out and asked him what he meant.

“I say, old feller,” he whispered, “the ride has done me good. I think I’ve got my courage up. I’m going to pop the question. You just clear out and give me a chance.”

He marched directly into the house, turning upon me as he stumbled through the doorway, a face of woful anxiety which must have been like a reflection of my own. There was no help for it, no decent way of stopping him; and so I hurried homeward, feeling myself to be one of the most miserable idiots alive. Was ever a man placed in a situation so wretched and yet so ludicrous? Here I was, getting away from Seacliff as fast as I decorously could, whistling loudly to show that I was going, and all that a fellow, whose witlessness I daily laughed over, might have a chance to rob me of my supremest idol. I reached Pa Treat’s after what seemed like a fortnight’s march, walked up stairs on my head for aught I know, entered my room, locked the door, drew a chair to the window, bestrode it, looked out moodily on the Sound, thought of the gay old world which I had left beyond those waves, and resolved that, if dollars won the day, Europe should soon welcome me back. Then my mind wandered up to Seacliff, and peered in upon Bob as

he made his offer. Now he is talking love, I muttered; now he is taking her trembling hand in his; now the idiot is, perhaps, going on his clumsy knees; now she blushes and seems for a moment to refuse him; now she turns pale and whispers a word which drives me crazy; now he springs to his feet and—I spring to mine, knocking the chair over. On that chair, and by that window, I passed what the French call “a bad quarter of an hour.”

Dinner-time came, and, to save appearances, I tried to eat and talk as usual. Then I returned to my room and smoked several cigars in quick succession, without noticing how many, until I saw the stumps lying all together on the table. Finally, hearing Johnny Treat's short-winded footsteps thumping up the stairway, I rushed into the passage to seek distraction in the society of that small sinner, whose character for total depravity would of course render him particularly congenial to my feelings at such a moment. Seriously, I was in a state of mind which rendered me just fit to tag after Johnny Treat.

“Where are you going, Johnny?” I asked.

“Goin up garret,” responded the urchin, with his usual solemn brevity, so proper for an infant loaded with his spiritual responsibilities and terrors.

“I'll go up with you,” said I; and we gravely mounted together.

The garret was a favorite resort of Johnny's, and no despised place of recreation with myself. In regard to climate it was an epitome of the vast and various world we live in, being as hot in summer as the torrid zone, and as frigid in winter as the polar circle. Winds it had of its own, and rains and snows too; for the leaky old roof let in copious samples of the elements. Every time that a storm burst along our shore Ma Treat rushed up garret and stationed there a garrison of pails and milkpans, into which the big drops pattered fluently with a sort of juicy tinkle. There was always a powerful odor of rats about the apartment,

which must have made it pleasant to a grimalkin; and by night a four-footed clamor broke out there, which made me dream that I was in Noah's ark, and had a state-room under the vermin deck. * Whether these attic wits acted charades, or had fancy balls, or played ten-pins with the corn-cobs, or set the old trumpery in the corners, to rights, or snowballed each other with bits of plaster, I cannot say, but the noise sounded like a little of everything as I lay in my bedroom below. By day all these energetic workers and revellers were as quiet as ghosts, except an occasional gallop behind the laths, or a squeaking oath at intruders delivered through some hole in the flooring.

The garret was chiefly valuable in my eyes through its congregation of worthless old furniture. Rush-bottomed chairs, with no bottoms and decrepit backs; a grenadier clock, which had stopped ticking during the battle of Bunker Hill; a nail-cask full of tattered deeds, accounts, and letters, showing how the Treats had once been a noticeable family; a lame wash-stand, burnt-out foot-stove, broken-winded bellows, bottomless pails, one leg of a tongs, and corn-cobs in superfluity; such was the array of curiosities which encumbered the floor and disordered the corners of this interesting seclusion. It was not by any means a rich collection, considering the antiquity of the house, but it was nevertheless a prodigious comfort in rainy weather.

One object there was which deserves particular notice, and which I have omitted to mention thus far, not out of forgetfulness, but out of pure reverence, because it did not seem proper to speak of the weapon of an old Puritan soldier, in the same breath with shovels and tongs. This weapon was a long, cut-and-thrust sword, straight in the blade, heavily hilted, ponderous, dull, and rusty, but withal of a most fiercely orthodox aspect, as if it were just the thing to hew a catholic or an episcopalian in pieces before the Lord. To this ancient side arm belonged a history which made it a precious heirloom to the Treats, and caused its preservation in all their ups and downs of fortune.

It seems that the first Treat who possessed it was one of the early settlers of Hartford, in Connecticut. He lived in a cabin situated at some distance from the village, and supported, beside his wife and children, a grandfather who had become very venerable and correspondingly dilapidated. The Pequot war broke out, and the Pequot braves made themselves disagreeably useful in sending to glory all the Puritans that they could lay their copper-colored hands upon. Goodman Treat came home at noon one day to find that his dinner and his cabin had been burnt together, and that a band of yelling savages was posted between him and Hartford. His wife and children had escaped in some way not specified by tradition, though probably, according to the praiseworthy custom of those days, by following the guidings of Providence; but the best that his grandfather had been able to do for himself was to crawl into the garden with the family sword in his hands, and hide among the cornstalks. Goodman Treat stumbled over him and piously resolved to save him. Taking down a clothes-line, he strapped the old gentleman securely across his own broad shoulders, as Eneas did by Anchises, and then, drawing his sword, marched to encounter the enemy.

A hundred Indians met him, and both sides charged together. The savages yelled after their unmelodious fashion, and the two white men replied with nine cheers and a tiger. Goodman Treat cut, thrust, and parried with such dexterity that not a tomahawk touched him, while his trusty blade snipped off Pequot heads and arms as easily as asparagus tops. His grandfather held still and cheered him on, which was the most that the ancient worthy could do under the circumstances. The Indians were resolved to get the two scalps, but Goodman Treat was equally resolved to disappoint them; and he trudged on steadily, heroically, striking right, striking left, thrusting ahead, and leaving behind him two winrows of bisected savages to enrich his clearing. Heaven favored him, or something did, for he cut his way through the painted

host and reached Hartford without having been either hurt or frightened. But alas! his triumph was embittered by a terrible bereavement. He had not been able to parry quite as dexterously behind as before, and when he unloosed his clothes-line he found that he possessed but the remnant of a grandfather. The Pequot tomahawks had made sad work with the old gentleman; his head, legs, and arms had successively fallen into the hands of the enemy; and there was scarce enough left of him to keep on his doublet.

Subsequent to this affair, Goodman Treat gloriously distinguished himself and horribly avenged his ancestor, in the successful expedition against the fort of Sassacus. He died in his bed at last, after a long life of piety and Indian fighting, and went to a better world, where he is now, very probably, engaged in driving Pequot ghosts out of their Happy Hunting-Grounds.

Johnny's object in coming up garret was evidently to play at soldiering with the old sword. For some time he stood glowering at it with a countenance of exceeding reverence and desire; then he ventured to take it in both hands, then to draw it, and finally to march about with it on his shoulder. It was a naughty luxury, a solitary vice, to which he rarely dared treat himself. Ma Treat had set her flinty face against this love of cold steel, considering that it fostered a bloodthirsty, unchristian spirit which might end in making the boy a pirate, a highwayman, or a soldier. It was in vain to plead the example and the glory of her husband's pious ancestor, the illogical creature always discomfited you by replying that there were no Pequots nowadays, to speak of, and that Johnny's grandfathers were both dead and out of harm's way ever so long ago. "Besides," she sometimes added, "the child might cut his own nose off, and gracious knows that he hasn't any to spare."

"Johnny," said I, after watching the perspiring lad for some minutes, as he tramped up and down the hot garret,—
"Johnny, why do you like to carry that sword?"

"Because I am a wicked boy," droned Johnny, with that depraved indifference to the awful fact, which so often excited the grief of his grandmother.

"And what do you merit for your wickedness?" I asked.

"The pains of hell, forever," responded Johnny, in the same tone of monstrous unconcern.

"And what next, Johnny?"

"That's as far as I go," he replied, stopping his parade and looking at me anxiously, as if fearful that I was about to urge him a step further into that slough of despond, the catechism.

"Well," said I, "that's far enough, Johnny."

I suppose it will be seen that I was trying to pass away time and kill reflection. The garret could not amuse me long, and I went back to my room to fight my Pequots alone. Twenty times I seized my hat, resolved to rush up to Seacliff and know the worst at once; but twenty times I threw it down again, to drop feeble and purposeless into my rocking-chair. It was about three o'clock, I think, that I heard a slow, sullen step on my stairway, followed by a timid knock at my door.

"Come in," said I; and Robert Van Leer entered. If I had been a girl, conscious that this was a lover come to propose to me, my heart could not have beat faster. He stared at me for one moment with haggard eyes, and then, dragging his Kossuth hat over his face, burst into tears. I pitied him, but I could have laughed for joy.

"I'm done for!" he sobbed. "Oh, Fitz Hugh! I shall go into a consumption. I wish I could!"

"But you can't, Bob," said I; "so don't waste your time in trying it. Bait your hook again, and heave it somewhere else. There are plenty of other fish in the sea just as fine as this one."

Perhaps it was no lie that I uttered, but I believed that it was, and felt correspondingly guilty.

"No there ain't," he muttered. "And that ain't the worst

of it. Now she'll have Somerville. He's after her,—and she must like him ; she *must* like somebody, or she wouldn't have sacked me."

"He shan't have her!" exclaimed L. "I'll take her myself, first ; that is if I can get her."

"Will you, though?" returned the good-souled, unselfish fellow, his broad face lighting up a little. "I wish you would. I swear, I don't know anybody I'd like to have her better than you. That Somerville is a rascal, I believe ; he'd make her miserable."

My offer and promise could not comfort him so thoroughly but that he went away at last in wretchedly low spirits.





CHAPTER XXIV.

RESULTS OF REJECTED ADDRESSES.

HAVE you ever noticed a child whose little temper has just been subdued, and sweetened by a sound whipping? His eyes soft and damp with tears, his forehead humbled, his feet noiseless, his voice gentle though with the echo of a sob in it, he clings to his mother's knee, looks up into her face for forgiveness, is unresentful, meek, and tender-hearted, and goes to bed the model of an angel-boy, too good to live long. Poor Robert Van Leer, the discarded, the disappointed, wore just this chastened air, uncomplaining, unreproachful, and asking nothing but pardon. I had supposed that he would rant and rave under his affliction, or even, perhaps, seek revenge upon Miss Westervelt by some system of coarse persecution; but beneath his rough exterior there was a kinder, more innocent, more childlike heart than any of us knew of; and it had no malice, no vindictiveness, no vulgarity of feeling stored away in those deepest depths which had now for the first time been opened. I treated him with the profoundest respect in those days, and I often saw Miss Westervelt glance at him with an expression of pain and pity.

But Mr. Westervelt was far from accepting the event in so proper a spirit. Returning from New York the day after the rejection, he soon gave cause to suspect that he had heard of it, by certain mild and inarticulate symptoms of anger,

which would have been about as terrible to most people as the wrath of a disgusted mouse. He was, of course, too timid to attack either me or Somerville; and Mary had to endure alone his sidelong, half-expressed whimpering fretfulness. What he said and did was not in itself very difficult to bear; but then she loved him with a whole-souled fervor, which laid her quite open to his persecution; a fervor which contrasted singularly with the feebleness and vacillation of his own nature. She thought of every little attention for him; her whole manner begged for a kind word or look; but he was consistently deaf and blind to her presence. It required very slight observation to detect his game of annoyance, dull, lifeless, voiceless, deedless as it was, and little as I saw them together. I am wrong, by the way, to call it a game, for there was probably nothing planned or systematic in his conduct, and he would have preferred, I am afraid, to scold her outright, assert his paternal authority fiercely, play the iron father of the good old time, and drive her into the opulent match which he had set his faint heart upon. But the stuff that he was made of was not stern enough for despotism, and so his anger expressed itself in a feeble-minded worrying, much like that of a cross child. He used to meet her with dismal averted face; to withhold the morning and evening kiss which he was accustomed to give her; to fret at her awkwardness when she brought him his slippers or did him any other gentle office; to sit glumly speechless when she tried to interest him in her little plans and hopes; to complain that she hurt him when she put her arm around his neck; to quit the room when she came upon him alone; and that was about all. A characteristic scene in this melodrama occurred during one of my usual twilight calls at Seaclyff. Mary had taken a seat beside her father, on a settee under the trumpet honeysuckle. The rest of the family were scattered about the veranda, on other settees, or in those iron chairs which made such a ponderous pretence of rusticity. The two Van Leers were silently enjoying their

vesper cigars ; for tobacco-smoke was no affront to the lares and penates of Seacliff.

“And so, papa,” resumed Mary, when I had taken my seat, “we shall pass the winter here very comfortably. You can run down to New York as you do now, and Genevieve can make the Christmas visit to grandpapa. Mamma and I shall not be afraid to keep house alone. It will be much less extravagant than wintering in New York ; and to me, at least, it will be just as pleasant.”

Mr. Westervelt moaned feebly, as if utterly wearied of the subject, and then, turning to Bob, referred the whole matter to him with an ostentatious show of deference which confused the poor youth and amused Mrs. Van Leer.

“Robert,—I should rather say, Mr. Van Leer,—what do you think?—or, rather, allow me to ask your opinion. I have great confidence in your judgment, you know, Robert.”

“Oh! don’t leave it to me,” deprecated Bob. “I don’t know what to say. Miss Mary knows. I think what she said was—was first-rate. Its kind of hard, though, she should be shut up here all winter in this lonely place. I tell you what—no, that wouldn’t do, though. Never mind—I wasn’t going to say anything particular.”

“But Robert—Mr. Van Leer—you can propose anything you like, you know,” insisted Mr. Westervelt. “We shall be glad of your opinion. I have no doubt we should agree with your views entirely.”

“Yes—no—nothing,” stammered Bob. “I wasn’t thinking of anything. I don’t know as I was. I guess I wasn’t going to say anything.”

Just at this moment that genial Mrs. Van Leer was seized with something between a cough and a titter.

Robert, much disconcerted by the sound, turned a furtive forlorn eye upon her, but showed no signs of offence in his diffident and humbled countenance. Whatever vices of character, whatever perversities and asperities had been implanted in the sorrowing lad by nature and education, seemed to have

been all changed by his late disappointment into a harvest of the meekest and bashfullest virtues. He glanced around him to see if the laugh was general, and then dropped his head with a sigh upon his bosom. Meantime Miss Westervelt, leaning her cheek on her hand, sat quite still, looking at her father with such a pleading, anxious, almost penitent expression, that it made his sickly moroseness seem downright cruelty.

"Papa!" she said presently, in a tone that absolutely supplicated for his notice.

"What?" grunted papa, without suffering the light of his countenance to fall upon her.

"You don't seem to know that I am here, papa," she whispered.

I could not see the tears peeping out of their nest, but I felt sure that they were there, because she spoke with that smothered voice which we all have when trouble changes the countenance and dims the sight. He did not soften to her sorrow, but gathered more waywardness from it, according to the nature of moral cowards.

"You—you trouble me, Mary," he said. "There! haven't you sat by me long enough? Let your sister have the place now. Come, Genevieve, come and sit by your father."

Mary left her seat, but Genevieve did not occupy it. Turning her spirited profile toward her genitor, she replied, with a coolness which almost made me smile, "No, I thank you, papa; I don't care for the seat at all; I am very well as I am."

There was a little defiant asperity in her face, and still more in the sharp toss of her head. She evidently saw through the system of teasing coercion which was being practised on her sister, and sympathized with neither the spirit nor the object of it. Perhaps she was not at all sorry that Bob had been refused, inasmuch as it saved him for herself, supposing she should ever want him, and also punished him for the absurdity of lavishing his affections on another.

I do not mean to malign Jenny ; I assert positively that she was a whole-souled, generous girl ; but I still think that it annoyed her to see her sister getting two thirds of the attentions and all the offers. She took it as a slight upon her own attractions, and could not understand that she was only seventeen.

Mr. Westervelt made no response of word or look to his youngest daughter's insubordination ; he bowed before Genevieve's spunk just as readily and instinctively as he bullied Mary's gentleness.

" Oh ! you don't care about it ? Well, never mind," he said ; and, getting up with a moan, wandered moodily down the garden. Our faces seemed brighter in the growing moonlight as this frail, invalid, troubled, disappointed being passed out from among us.

" I am sorry that Mr. Westervelt seems unwell," observed Somerville, in his well-bred fashion, too civil to see beneath the surface.

" Yes," sighed Mrs. Westervelt. " Business weighs heavily on him. It is a sorrowful world," she added, in a commonplace way, thinking perhaps how sad it was that she could not be a young lady and a belle, as she used to be.

" Very likely," said Somerville. " Most people quietly acknowledge that, sooner or later. But it is a fact of the impertinent, disagreeable species, and I generally treat it with silent contempt. Isn't that your way, Miss Westervelt ? "

" I don't know," she replied, wearily. " I haven't lived long enough to have a way."

" Oh ! there you have the advantage of me," said Somerville, with bow and smile complimentary. " It is agreeable to be young, and fortunate while one is young. There are few men wise enough to wish they had been born women ; but I am one of the few. Of course, I shouldn't care to be an ugly woman. ~ Far from me be that misery ! "

" Which of us four would you rather be ? " asked Mrs. Van Leer, slipping out her pretty foot.

"All four, if you please, one after the other," decided Somerville.

"Very gallant; much obliged to you," said the lady. "What is your choice, Mr. Fitz Hugh?"

"I don't know that I care for a change," I responded.

"He is afraid of disappointing some young lady," whispered Somerville to Mrs. Van Leer.

"I don't find it so disagreeable to call myself one of the works of creation," I continued. "Perhaps, however, I would like to combine a woman's heart with a man's head."

"Then your heart would always be quarrelling with your head,—making a fool of it, perhaps," said Somerville, aloud.

"Guess *you* never was troubled that way," put in Bob, with sudden energy.

Mrs. Westervelt gave Somerville a glance of singular meaning; a glance instantly withdrawn, and of which he took no manner of notice. Genevieve clapped her hands, tapped Bob on the back, and laughed boisterously. Robert seemed to be quite cheered by the success of his sally, and looked round him for a moment with the air of a man who feels himself a match for the wittiest and wisest. It was the one solitary intentional atticism of his life, and even to this present he does not desist from occasionally calling it up, as a cow does her cud, and chewing the reminiscence of it with great vanity and satisfaction. After an evening with a party of new acquaintances, after every other man has cracked his joke, or told his story, Bob will begin modestly, "Well, I never was smart but once;" and then will come an extended history of his satirical onslaught upon Somerville, followed by a tremendous burst of laughter, entirely his own and in its way very superior.

This was pretty much all that occurred worthy of notice during the evening. The reader, perhaps, inquires disdainfully whether I consider such trifling incidents and dialogues as these worthy of notice; and certainly my most suitable reply seems to be a bow of humility and a shrug of depreca-

tion. But, after all, is it my fault that I live in a degenerate age, when there are no dragons, nor enchanters, nor hardly any pirates, and when fathers do not immure their recusant daughters in sloppy dungeons? On second thoughts, moreover, I am thankful that the incidents of my life at Seacliff were no more melodramatic; for, externally quiet, homely, and unadventurous as they were, they abbreviated my sleep, reduced my weight, and kept me in a constant worry. No man who has not been thoroughly in love, that is so far enamored as to loathe and despise his bachelorhood, can understand how many distresses a lover has to encounter, even when no magician sails away with the mistress of his soul, and when her papa is but an ordinary specimen of a well-mannered and pretty good-natured American.

But in reality there was a secret romance, of a painful character, within that simple country life of Seacliff. It crept invisibly yet perceptibly, beneath all our hours of innocent talk and laughter, like a serpent writhing unseen among fresh grasses and flowers. It was so inaudible that it seemed far off, in-existent, impossible, and yet it might spring upon us at any moment, stinging some to death, and others to lifelong anguish. The lightning is high and quiet in the clouds, but it can reach the earth in a second, and destroy before its thunder-footstep has been heard. I was sure that some vague danger was muttering near, but I could not tell what was its exact nature, nor whether it was approaching or retreating. Have you never been surrounded by the din of streets or of conversation, and at the same time heard music playing far away, the sound certain but the air uncertain, a few notes reaching your ear and then no more, and then again a doubtful muffled burst of the distant melody? You listen intently, trying to catch the tune, but you listen in vain, and cannot tell whether it is a bacchanalian song or a funeral miserere, whether it is a warlike march or a saintly anthem. It was just so that I hearkened to the undertones of that mystery which pervaded the life of Seacliff. That

some strange drama, or possibly tragedy was enacting, I knew ; but what it exactly was, how it would end, and when, I could not be sure. Suspicions indeed I had, sombre and persistent enough ; but no certain knowledge that would enable me to warn or to save.

Perhaps it will interest some persons to know that Mrs. Van Leer finished the evening by dragging off Somerville to walk in the garden. It was a prolonged stroll, and a merry one, if one could judge by the lady's giggling. In the mean time Henry Van Leer smoked cigar after cigar, staring abstractedly at Long Island, and thinking the thoughts of an oyster. Occasionally he turned his glance toward his wife's white muslin, as her laughter and chatter burst more merrily than ordinary from the deepest shadows of the garden ; and then a quiet pleasure illuminated his bovine face, as if another moon had suddenly shone upon it, and a look of pleasure like a star beamed from his slow brown eyes. I never knew a heavier-moulded man, nor one more devoid of guile and suspicion. He lovingly put his arm round his wife's waist when she returned, flushed with romping, and elated with the delightful consciousness that her flirting had been reciprocated. Dull and leaden as he was, and clever as her sparkling impertinences sometimes seemed, she was disgracefully unworthy of him. From this evening she cultivated Somerville ; she irrigated him with her flirtations ; and the affair prospered.

As I was leaving the grounds Mr. Westervelt pounced upon me so suddenly that I suspected him of having laid wait for me.

" Oh—ah—Mr. Fitz Hugh, is that you ?" said he ; " I— I was just meditating on something that—that puzzles me,— yes, puzzles me. By the way, it is no affair of yours, and I ought not to trouble you with it. The fact is, I should not trouble you with it, ha ha, but for the obligations we are under to you. A curious reason, isn't it ? You save my daughter's life, and I bore you with our private affairs.

Well, the case is, that I am from home a good deal; and you—you are here a good deal,—I mean occasionally,—always very happy to have you call, of course; but perhaps, as you are an observant man, and have had opportunities for observation,—perhaps you could give me some light on the subject. The truth is, Mr. Fitz Hugh, that there is something going on in my house that I do not quite understand.”

In his embarrassment he now came to a full stop. I stood silent also, looking away from him, puzzled and anxious, if not fairly alarmed. Had he at last suspected the household mystery, and was he about to question me concerning its meaning? What did I *know* of it, and how could I torture him with my mere suspicions?

“Really, I ought not to trouble you with it,” he resumed. “But then, you remember, I made you a confidant in my views with regard to—to the proposed alliance of our mutual friend Robert, with—with my family, in short. And, therefore, it seems natural that I should not conceal from you the result of those views—or plans. The truth is, that my eldest daughter seems to be biased against our mutual friend. You will, of course, keep it a profound secret; but she is prejudiced,—in fact, decidedly prejudiced. Now, Mr. Fitz Hugh, who has been the cause of this?” (Here he tried to study my countenance.) “Do you—allow me to ask—do you suspect Mr. Somerville of having used any influence against our mutual friend, Robert?” (Still looking as steadily as he dared into my eyes, and creeping close up to me as if he would steal into my mouth after the secret.) “If so, you would confer a great favor by letting me know it. I should, of course, use the information with prudence. Excuse me; it is a bold question, I know; but then I am a father and have my daughter’s hap—” (a cough) “happiness greatly at heart. And then this Somerville is,—well, excellent family, to be sure, none better,—fine manners, and all that sort of thing,—but, after all, he is not exactly the husband that I

ould like to give my daughter to. Would hardly make her happy, I am afraid."

I had been trying to speak for some time, but he had checked me eagerly with his forefinger. I answered crisply and clearly now, for I felt a various and very energetic indignation. "No, sir, I don't know that Mr. Somerville has exercised influence for or against Robert. I don't know that he has any influence with Miss Westervelt. I have been admitted into neither his secrets nor Miss Westervelt's."

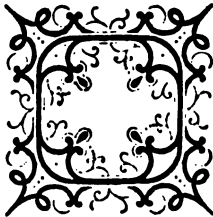
"Oh!—ah," he murmured, and slid back from me with an air of disappointment. While he stood silent, studying out, perhaps, some new course of cross-examination, I put in a distracting remark about the weather, bade him a polite good-evening, and dodged away.

I had no more private conversations with Mr. Westervelt, or the present. He received news next day that some copper mine had blown up on Lake Superior, and that his presence was imperatively demanded among the falling fragments in New York.

Is any one curious to know how I now stood with Somerville? He made no more attacks upon me, except it were in the form of faint insinuations, covert sneers, and ironical compliments, so glossed over with a sheen of smiles, that I am not sure, even at this day, that I understood them aright. In the mean time I question whether he was profoundly comfortable, although no billow underneath ever rocked the frozen surface above. Day by day he must have seen more clearly that he had no chance of winning Miss Westervelt; and such revelations can grievously vex the vanity of a woman-killer, even if they cannot disturb his heart. As for me, I did not seek quarrel; I was too happy, too contented for that; it is never the winning player who gets angry. I hoped, or rather I dared believe that I was finding my way back to Miss Westervelt's confidence, and that she already looked upon me as a sure friend in time of trouble. Did I hear this confession in her tones, or see it in her manner?

Of course I could not: a man in love is like one who carries a lantern by night; his own form is lit up, but all at a little distance is darkness. However, there soon came an hour when I no longer groped alone, but saw another figure beside me, she also bearing a lantern like mine, which illuminated her fair face, and showed me that on her forehead was written a new name.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

IT was a still, hot midsummer twilight when Pa Treat came home from a barn-raising which had been accomplished some two miles distant, and told a pitiful story of a poor, simple fellow named Warner, who had fallen from a scaffolding and been carried home with a broken leg.

“It’s a bad business for him and his folks,” observed Pa Treat, gravely. “I know they haint anything for a rainy day. He’s a mighty feeble, silly creetur; don’t know how to work; wife don’t know how to save. Regular pair of—blunderbusses. A whole boat-load of young ’uns, too. They’ll be hard up.”

It struck me at once that I ought to walk over to Warner’s, and see what I could do for him. In general I am a lazy man in my charities, and would rather give a dollar to a street beggar whom I strongly suspect of being an impostor, than go half a dozen blocks to expend a shilling on a worthy family; but Miss Westervelt had invigorated all my virtues, and made me for the time an indomitable philanthropist. I knew that she would hurry to the Warners as soon as she learned of their distress, and I wished to have her hear that I had been there before her. Accordingly, putting money in my purse, and taking a basket of eatables which Ma Treat contributed, I set off, at about half-past seven, on

my errand of somewhat selfish benevolence. Sombre clouds flocked in the horizon ; a current of fresh humid wind shot through the sultry atmosphere ; and I had not made a quarter of a mile before I thought it prudent to go back for my umbrella. Now came an obstacle in the way of my benignity : the desired utensil could nowhere be discovered. Unquestionably there is something remarkably transitory and migratory in the character of umbrellas. Their sudden and unlooked-for disappearances have no little air of the marvellous ; and perhaps it might be reckoned one of the great questions of the age, where all the umbrellas go to ? Innumerable individuals have lost one, but nobody ever seems to have found one. Whether they are subject to the mysterious and mischievous principalities of the air, or whether they take flight to the arctic circles in search of their whale relatives, it would be difficult to decide ; but it seems certain that they are occasionally governed by influences not altogether human.

My umbrella was as undiscoverable as the northwest passage. Darkness was upon earth, the storm approaching ; and Ma Treat urged me, with motherly solicitude for my health, to put off my philanthropy till the morrow ; but I thought of Miss Westervelt, and plunged out into the murky, gusty evening. I walked furiously ; struck across lots to shorten the distance ; came to a swamp and was obliged to go round it ; lost the road and had to inquire it at three farm-houses ; and thus was fully three quarters of an hour in going the two miles. During the last ten minutes I travelled fast, lighted and speeded on by streams of lightning sharp, near, and almost continuous in their blinding succession. The final ten rods were done at a killing pace under the first drenching rush of the storm. As I came in front of the house, an electric blaze lit it up with such a pale dazzling glory as the most sumptuous palace never wore by day, transfiguring its low, brown, dilapidated front into the similitude of a spectral, spiritual mansion not made with hands, and worthy to shine

in eternal heavens. Great is the transforming magic of moonlight; greater still the terrible enchantment of lightning. I burst into the front door without knocking, and stood for a moment dripping in a dark entry. Then a side door opened, letting a glimmer of light upon me; and a shrill, disagreeable female voice called through the crack, "Who's there?"

Bowing blandly, I announced my name and errand with that insinuating, almost apologetical voice, which a man is very apt to use when he is offering a charity which may not, perhaps, be graciously received.

"Come in," said Mrs. Warner, flinging the door back. "Much obleeged to ye, to be sure. Law suz, how wet ye be! Let me take yer basket. Oh!" (with some contempt) "cold victuals! We shall have cold victuals enough, I reckon. Can't pay the doctor with cold victuals."

"From Mrs. Treat," said I, and stopped in wonder, to stare at Miss Westervelt. There she was, in her broad hat and linen cape, standing by the bedside of the maimed man and nodding to me with a smile and a blush.

"You are before me, then?" I said. "Of course. Well, what is there to be done?"

"Nothing," she replied. "Except for Mr. Warner to lie here patiently till his leg is well," she added, turning to the invalid.

"That's enough, I reckon," he muttered in a tone half chuckle, half whimper. "It's play for the rest of you, but work for me. Oh, Lordy!"

"Guess I've got to work a few to get *your* living, old man," remarked the wife, snappishly. "How I'm to dew it, and wait on you tew, the goodness gracious knows,—I don't."

"Don't be uneasy, Mrs. Warner," said I. "You shan't suffer. Keep up your spirits, and things won't go so badly."

"Well, I'm glad to hear on't," was her gracious reply. "But we *have* suffered in our time, and I wan't folks to know it."

"Where are the children?" I asked. "I thought you had five or six."

"So we have," she responded with a grimace which did not seem to express gratitude for the blessing. "Wall, the two oldest is out to sarvice, finally. As for the young 'uns, one neighbor has took one, and one has took another, till we've got rid of the whole scrape and bilin of 'em, 'cept Polly there, who's kep to go arrants and fetch the doctor."

I turned and surveyed a dirty, ragged, sunburnt girl of six or seven, sitting on her heels in a corner, and staring wistfully at her mother, who just then picked a lump of sugar out of the basket and ate it with gusto. The child sighed slightly, glanced at me as if to demand my interest, and observed in a clear, pleasant, resigned voice, with perhaps a dash of vanity in it, "I get sugar too, when I take my gin."

The maternal fist was shaken at her in a private way, and the remark did not give rise to conversation.

The Warners, in short, were by no means interesting poor people. The father was a simpleton, the mother a tartar, the children pests to the neighborhood; and all of them drank spirituous liquors to the utmost measure of their ability to have and to hold. In almost every New England township there are two or three such families, whose names are become synonyms for hereditary vice and worthlessness, whose young ones feed the prisons, and whose elders are buried without a stone in the shabbiest corner of the churchyard. The breed seems to be hopelessly bad, and its history is a monotonous record of idleness and crime, ending with an attack of the venerable family distemper, delirium tremens, or perchance with a more exalted anguish in the prison court.

There was little to do at present for the relief of the Warners. The doctor had set the limb skilfully and the injured man was not sick enough to require a watcher. I slipped into the entry, on pretence of looking at the weather, but really to get a bill out of my pocket-book, wherewith

unobservedly to assuage Mrs. Warner's sorrows. Miss Westervelt followed me and whispered, "Don't give them money. They might spend it foolishly. Our way is to put a few dollars to their credit at the Temperance Store in Rockford, and let them trade it out. It keeps them from buying rum."

I thanked her, and, reëntering the room, informed the Warners, somewhat to their disgust, I thought, that I should deposit ten dollars to their account in the Temperance Store. I have sometimes wondered whether I should have given as much as that, if Miss Westervelt had not been present and things generally had not been pretty much as things happily were.

"Our next business is to get home," observed I, glancing at the streaming windows.

"That will be easy enough," said Miss Westervelt. "The carriage is close by, in some shed or other. Will you call it?"

Forgetting that my voice was water-proof, while my person was apt to catch cold, I did not stand wisely in the entry and halloo, but ran out in the rain to look for James. He saw me, probably, for there was a trampling of hoofs, a rolling of wheels, and the Seacliff barouche pulled up at the door. An encouraging word to the sick man, a "Good-night, ma'am," to Mrs. Warner, a sixpence to the darling who only got sugar when she took her gin, a helping hand to Miss Westervelt, and I found myself buttoned up warm in the carriage, having of course forgotten Ma Treat's eleemosynary basket.

A slight arrangement of dress, perhaps unconscious, seemed to tell me that I might venture to take a seat beside Miss Westervelt. The thunder had ceased now, and the rear-guard of the rain was hurrying past us in a charge of heavy, scattering drops; but the curtains were down and the windows closed, so that no belated passer, nor even the coachman could possibly see or hear us. It was the first time that I had ever been shut away with her alone, where no eye could

behold and no ear listen. The great world stood far apart from us, leaving me at liberty to speak all my thoughts; but, in place of the world, there was a spectral hand on my throat, strangling the words that I longed to utter. It was the same mysterious, elfish hand that has sought to force silence on every man that ever loved. Why was human nature so ordained that it cannot enunciate its most earnest, most sacred emotions, at least for the first time, except in accents that faint and flutter like little birds taking their first flight from the nest?

"Miss Westervelt, there is something which I must tell you," I said, suddenly, shaking the phantom grasp from my throat for a moment. She made no reply, but I expected none, waited for none, and continued, hurriedly, "Yes, I have something to tell you; and then a question to ask you."

I said it, I asked it, in spite of the goblin hand, in spite of Robert and Mr. Westervelt, in spite of the mystery. I remember the very words which faltered over my lips, like dying waves sobbing across a bar, but I shall not write them here, for although they were only mine, and were, perhaps, of most commonplace nature, they still seem to me too sacred to be flung through the world.

"Oh, Mr. Fitz Hugh! stop!" she whispered. "Please, don't say this to me. You must not! you must not!"

"And why must I not?" said I, eagerly, the phantom grasp all broken now. "What is there in the way? Do you dislike me? Tell me. Do you dislike me?"

There was a "No," whispered, oh so faintly, so unwillingly, and yet so kindly!

"Then, why may I not talk to you so?" I urged. "Why not ask you *that*? Can't you ever like me enough to be what I wish you to be? Don't make me unhappy. Can't you? Tell me, yes."

Perhaps the spectre was troubling her now, for she made no answer, except to sob gently. Of a sudden she snatched her hand away from my lips, saying, "No no! I cannot—I

cannot. You must not. Oh! indeed, you must not think of it any more."

"But what does this mean, Mary? What is it that makes it wrong? Are you—engaged to any one else? Is that it?"

"No no! I am not engaged. I never have been. Oh! I cannot tell you what it is. Please, don't ask me."

"Is it your father? Does he dislike me? I know that he meant you for some one else,—for Robert. It was he who told me so; and I supposed at one time that you were certainly to marry Robert."

"No, it is not that. That is all over. I could never marry Robert, and papa knows it. It is something else, that I can never tell you; but if you should ever know it, you would be satisfied; you would feel that I am doing right in saying that we must never, never talk of this any more."

"You *could* love me, then? and you *are* willing to marry me? but you cannot?"

"Oh, no! I cannot. I must not, for your sake. You would not wish me to do it, if you knew all. For your own sake, you would not."

"But, what if I do not care at all about my own sake? What if my own sake insists on being married without the least regard to consequences,—without the least regard to anything, however frightful or painful, or shameful?"

"It is impossible. You talk in that way because you do not know what I know. If I should accept you now, and tell you this secret afterward, when it would be too late for you to retreat, you would hate me. No, believe me that I know best; and I know that I ought not to consent."

In spite of the darkness and the muddy road, the driver had made good speed, and we were now grinding through the gravel before the front steps of Seacliff. There was just time to give her hand a dozen kisses, and to whisper, "You must consent; you shall consent; I will talk to you about this to-morrow," when the door opened, and I had to aid her into

the veranda. The hall lamp was shining full upon us, and Mrs. Westervelt had come out to meet us. She stared at my dear companion's blushing excited face, and turned briskly to give me a glance of scrutiny, under pretence of seeing if I was not wet. Protesting my state of perfect drouth, I slid into the shadow of one of the Ionic columns, made my goodnight bow from thence, muttered something about the pleasure of seeing her again in the morning, and skipped away homeward. Ma Treat gave me no peace, and would accept of none herself until I had changed all my clothes, and scalded myself half to death with hot tea. I got away from her as soon as possible, and locked myself into my room to enjoy the tumultuous, tossing gladness of my heart, all as absurd, of course, to the matter-of-fact reader as the waves of the ocean to the stirless, voiceless rocks that look down upon them. What these emotions were, I leave to the popular imagination, conscious that I have already been nigh upon wearisome in my confessions, and that I have hazarded a bold stroke in relating a love-scene to this turtle-blooded century. There are two periods in the life of a male human creature when he is apt to undervalue, or even to despise love-making. The first arrives in his extreme youth, before the mental and moral toga has been conferred on him; the second in his old age, after all the strength and fire of his noble prime have burned to cinders, and been dusted away by the wings of Time. As is the life of an individual, so, say the philosophers, is the life of a people. In which of these two periods our present sociality may be, whether in that of passionless childhood, or in that of exhausted senescence, I will not attempt to decide, although I greatly fear that we are very old, and, morally speaking, shall never see ninety again.

I felt no timidity, no doubts, no uneasiness, no repentance, nothing but gayety, happiness, and triumph, when I went up to Seacliff the next morning. I did not care a straw for her "must-nots" and "cannots," her hesitations and refusals. I knew what she meant by them all; I knew that she alluded

to that wicked mystery which was brooding near her ; but I did not care for the shame, and I would not have cared for it had it stood already unveiled to the world ; or rather, I longed to bear it with her, since it must be borne, and to put my own shoulders, instead of hers, beneath the burden. It was in the garden, on the bench of the grape arbor, that I found her. She looked very sad, thinking over her, "must-nots" and "cannots," I suppose ; but started up at sight of me, with a bright blush and a tremulous smile, such as greet a dear friend rather than an enemy.

"I have come to talk to you again about it, as I told you I should," said I.

She shook her head gravely, but did not speak, although her lips half parted.

"I could not say, last evening, half the things that I wanted to say," I went on. "But tell me one thing, Mary, before all others. What is that great obstacle?"

"Oh, don't ask me! I can really never tell you that. Don't force me!" she pleaded. "You would never ask me that question again if you knew how unhappy I am,—and have been." The tears started quickly, but she brushed them away with her hand, and quelled herself. "It is enough that I know what it is," she added, calmly, "and that I know it to be sufficient."

"But, suppose that I too know what it is, and that I don't consider it by any means sufficient," said I.

"But you don't know,—you can't know," she responded, excitedly.

"But I do know, Mary ; at least I think I do. Is it not something connected with Mr. Somerville?"

The blood all left her cheeks, and she stared at me quietly, silently, as a corpse might stare.

"I am sure that it is," I went on. "I know so much, at least. But, listen,—don't be alarmed,—I know very little more. He is spinning some wicked web here ;—I am sure of that, perfectly sure ;—but that is all that I am sure of. Never

mind ; it troubles you, I see ; don't let us talk of it any more. But, I must say this one thing further. Whatever he has done, whatever he is doing or may do, it makes no difference with me. No difference ? I will care for you all the more. Remember, now :—I shall not change my feelings or wishes because of Somerville ;—I am still determined to ask for you ; still determined to —— ”

Well, I will not repeat all that long conversation which it cost me to silence her scruples and quiet her anxieties.





CHAPTER XXVI.

WESTERVELT, SENIOR.

I LEFT Miss Westervelt with a declaration, not a little terrible to her, though she did not attempt to discuss it, that I should see her father as soon as possible and ask him what he thought of our new arrangement of the family constellations.

That very afternoon I took the cars to New York, and put up at the Astor House. I found Mr. Westervelt patrolling the marble checkers of the hall, his hands clasped behind him, his countenance fallen below zero, his whole air that of a man who is meditating his dying speech and confession. The Lake Superior mine had evidently hit him hard when it went off; had knocked more coppers out of him, perhaps, than it ever had in its own bowels. At first thought it seemed an entirely unpropitious moment to make my communication, and I dodged away before his wandering footsteps; but after walking a few moments in a side passage the idea occurred to me that this unlucky business man might now look upon his daughter as a non-paying investment, to be disposed of as soon as possible; and so, pulling my moustache, as bearded men are apt to do when they have weighty affairs on hand, I advanced to meet him. He halted at sight of me, smiled ungrudgingly, shook hands and asked in a weak voice, how were they all at Sealiff? I stated minutely the favorable plight of the family health, but I doubt whether he heard me, and

am confident that if anybody near him had whispered "Stocks!" he would have turned his back upon the most vital core of my narrative. With a somewhat decayed voice I finally asked if I could have the pleasure of seeing him alone for a few minutes. After a brief alarmed stare, he murmured, "Certainly, certainly," and, turning on his heel with spasmodic briskness, led the way to his room.

Never, I imagine, were two men brought together who looked more mortally afraid of each other than did Mr. Westervelt and I at that interesting moment when he dropped into an arm-chair and I on a sofa. I did not comprehend his expression then, and only noted it vaguely, as a man notes the margin of a book when he is reading; but I am confident now that he expected me to say something awful about stocks or copper mines; to tell him, perhaps, that he was hanging over the abyss of bankruptcy. The stairs, somehow, had jolted all the breath out of me, and during the moment that I waited for my powers of speech he seemed to suffer agonies. When the reality came out, therefore, and he found that I had nothing worse to say than to ask him for his daughter, his face brightened up so much that I thought I was about to get the paternal benediction instantaneously. Then came the old drooping of the weary, irresolute head; the old peevish look of uncertainty, trouble and timid discontent.

"I really don't know what to tell you, sir," were his first words. (So very characteristic!) "You have surprised me, Mr. Fitz Hugh. I did not expect this,—especially after the conversations that I had with you regarding my—my plans for Miss Westervelt. Accordingly I am quite—hem—astonished! I really had no idea of this state of things before, sir!! Nobody has informed me of it, or even hinted that such a thing was in progress, so that you must not consider it singular if I am rather amazed, sir!!!"

His adjectives and emphasis grew stronger in proportion as my face assumed an air of discomfiture. At first I was

unable to meet his look, but presently it became clear that he was charging me indirectly with bad faith, and then a thrill of resentment flushed me suddenly, besides, perhaps, giving my eyes a pugnacious sparkle. As my color rose, his expletives subsided and his voice died away until it became fairly a smile.

"Mr. Westervelt," I began, very earnestly indeed, "until a few days ago there was nothing to inform you of. I had no hopes of winning Miss Westervelt. I expected to see her become the wife of another. I am sure, sir, that I was not in any manner bound to tell you of feelings that I supposed were doomed to utter disappointment."

"No no,—of course not,—of course not," he murmured. "Excuse my emotion,—my warmth. I had set my heart on the suit,—the success of Robert. But that is hopeless,—that is hopeless,—I suppose."

"So Miss Westervelt assures me, sir; and so, I believe, he has assured others."

"Yes, yes. Well, I can't decide to-day," he responded, retreating again as he heard this new contradiction to his favorite project. "I must have time,—time to think about it. Call on me again to-morrow; yes, have the—the goodness to call and see me to-morrow; say at this hour about."

"Thank you, sir," I replied bowing. "Good afternoon Mr. Westervelt. I regret it bitterly, I do assure you, that I have been obliged to give you so much pain."

"No apologies, I beg. Good-day, sir," he replied in a peevish tone, though still bowing courteously.

He had half closed the door behind me, when he suddenly pulled it open again and called to me to wait a moment. "At your pleasure, sir," I replied, and stood expectant.

"Suppose, Mr. Fitz Hugh,—suppose you should see my father about this," he said, looking in my face with the air almost of a man who asks a favor. "Westervelt, senior, you know, in South Street. I have the greatest confidence in my father's views of things. If he approves,—why, if he ap-

proves, I shall endeavor to make no objection. I will go with you. No no; of course you had best see him alone. Stop an instant. I will give you a letter of introduction."

It was some ten minutes before he could get a note written to his satisfaction; and then he sealed it, so that I am to this day ignorant of its contents. I took it, thanked him, bowed again and left the room in a much wondering mood. It seemed an odd thing to demand a young lady of her grandfather while her father was yet living; but then in this case the grandfather kept the money-chest, and we all know how much may be locked up in a money-chest: how many laborious lives, how many hearts both young and old, how much sorrow and how much joy. Finally it occurred to me that Mr. Westervelt might count on the stern stuff of his sire to give me that positive rebuff which his own womanish nature desired, but dreaded to administer.

I was a low-spirited man at eleven o'clock next morning, when I set out for the office of Westervelt, senior. I was almost overcomingly tempted to encourage myself for the expedition with a glass of porter; but, fearful that the old gentleman might smell it in my breath and take a prejudice to me, I went off total abstinently. Once more I came to the Quincy granite doorway, and saw the grimy tin placard upon which was written the terrible name. In the doorway, too, stood the same small, thin, alert old gentleman, with the large Roman features and the short, stiff, white hair, glaring just as savagely as ever at the Quincy granite stores opposite, and beating the same sharp tattoo with his iron-shod cane on the Quincy granite lintel. Quincy granite seemed to be his favorite material, and he looked the impersonation of Quincy granite from top to toe. His hat, coat, vest, pants, and gaiters, were all of a Quincy granite color; his great eyes were of a cold, stony gray, astonishingly like polished Quincy granite; and his face, with its rugged lines and hard expression, was as the countenance of a Quincy granite quarry. I looked at him with dismay, thinking that the very rod of

Moses would run a poor chance of drawing waters of sympathy from such a compact veteran boulder.

"Mr. Westervelt, I believe," said I, bowing myself up the steps.

"Yes, sir," he returned, in such a dry, hard tone, that I thought one of the granite door-posts might have given it forth.

"Allow me to introduce myself as Mr. Fitz Hugh. I have a letter from Mr. Westervelt, junior, presenting me, and explaining, I believe, my object in calling on you."

"Humph!" he responded, with an air of profound contempt, which seemed to be directed at me, but which was probably meant for his absent offspring. "Come into my office, sir."

Turning short on his heels, like a drill-sergeant performing the about-face, he trotted up to a door with a window in it, pushed me into the room before him with obdurate Quincy granite politeness, and signed me to an office-chair, wooden-bottom, uncushioned, and savagely whittled. I handed him his son's letter, and there ensued a silence only broken by the rustling of the paper. He crossed his legs comfortably, read the note through with business-like despatch, folded it up, hid it away in a pigeon-hole, and then remarked, "Well, sir?"

"I am not quite sure," said I, "whether Mr. Westervelt has explained my intentions."

"He has, sir. He says you want to marry his daughter Mary."

"Yes, sir; it is precisely that; and he referred me to you."

"What do you want to marry her for? She's no money."

"I don't care about money," returned I, quite insulted.

"I ask for nothing but Miss Westervelt herself."

"How much are you worth?" he demanded, without taking the least notice of my sentimental excitement.

"About thirty thousand dollars," responded I, with a sudden feeling of shrinkage, as I thought of his six millions.

"Thirty thousand," said he. "Humph! It's not a great

sum, sir. I hope you know it. However, it's enough, with pluck, sir. I hadn't thirty hundred when I married. A man doesn't need much of an inheritance to make his way in the world. He doesn't need *any*, sir!" (Loudly.) "Make me young again, and set me down in my shirt, I don't care where, and I wouldn't call the king my cousin. Well, can you live on your money,—keep a wife on it?"

"Yes sir," replied I cheerfully, for I thought I saw that he was going to let me try the experiment.

"Be sure you can live, sir. Don't look to your father-in-law; he has nothing. Don't look to me, either;—I'm sick of my son and his family;—I think I shall disinherit them, sir. Lord! what a simpleton that boy of mine is! He has wasted capital enough, sir," (a smack of the cane on the floor,) "capital enough to make a dozen fortunes, that boy has."

As the thought of his fifty-year-old boy seemed to excite him unpleasantly, I hastened to change the subject. "My income is not large, sir; it is only about twenty-two hundred a year; but that will be sufficient, I think, to support us in the country."

"But will the little baggage live in the country? Most girls won't; must have a pavement; can't exist without rows of shops."

"There are a great many married women in the country, sir, as you can see by the number of children in the district schools."

"That's true," grinned the old gentleman. "There are some sensible and economical women still. Well, what are your investments?"

"Half bank stock, and half bond and mortgage, averaging seven per cent., and a little over."

"No business then?" he asked sternly, and all Quincy granite again.

"No business except authorship. I have got out one small work, and am writing another."

"Humph! Do you publish your own books?"

"No sir," returned I, remembering with some vanity that the "Idler in Italy" had been accepted by the first house to which it was offered.

"Very right, very right," said he. "Don't publish them; you'd be sure to lose, sir. By the way, you are the son of Charles Fitz Hugh, the lawyer, who died some ten years ago, eh?"

"I am, sir. I believe my family is a thoroughly respectable one."

"Don't care a straw for respectable families, sir. Every man is respectable for himself, or contemptible for himself. Your father *was* respectable. I knew him. Fine man. Clever man. Was climbing the ladder fast. Pity he died just when he did. If you are half the man that he was, I am glad to know you."

There was a silence of half a minute, during which the old gentleman leaped up and paced the office in an eager, nervous way, like a hyena pitching backward and forward in his cage. He was thinking, perhaps, that sons in general, nowadays, were not half the men that their fathers were, witness Westervelt, junior.

"Well, sir,—about the marriage?" I ventured to inquire.

"Oh—ah—certainly. You are a man of business, sir.

What does my granddaughter say?"

"She says, Yes."

"Settled then. Go along, and arrange the matter with her. By the way, staying in town? Dine with us this afternoon, at five, number 40, St. Joseph's Place. Good-morning, sir."

He shook my hand with a small, hard, nut-cracker grasp, and then nodded three or four times very briskly as I backed out of the doorway. I walked away with a swing, feeling as if the paving-stones were set on springs, and danced polkas of gladness under my feet; as if the Quincy granite stores shone upon me with a sort of petrified beneficence, and

uttered a ponderous millionaire benediction on my nuptial prospects. In securing the consent of Westervelt, senior, I had secured the consent of the universe, so far at least as concerned the family of Seacliff.

On reaching the Astor House I found a note from Westervelt, junior, in which he apologized for his unexpected departure, informed me that he had gone to Seacliff, hoped he should have the pleasure of seeing me there at my convenience, expressed his regards, &c. &c. His language was elaborately civil, that was certain; but his conduct was, to say the least, not remarkably affectionate. He is gone, I thought, to make a last desperate intercession with Mary, in favor of Bob and his two hundred thousand. I did not feel much frightened, however; for in the first place I had perfect confidence in the faith of my little girl; and in the second, had not Quincy granite, senior, a man whose words were rocks, told me that it was *settled*?

At a quarter to five I was ringing at the door of No. 40, St. Joseph's Place. The house was an isolated one, lofty and large-fronted enough, but with an exterior of plain brick, which to my mind did not by any means adequately represent six millions. An elderly, withered English waiter, whose dry red cheeks threw his small white whiskers into shining relief, inducted me into a monstrous parlor, chiefly remarkable for being furnished with carved oak instead of the usual rosewood and mahogany. In a small, low rocking-chair sat one of those smooth, mild, white, placid old ladies who somehow remind one of an untroubled dish of blanc-mange. She rose at my entrance and advanced two or three steps to meet me, smiling upon me the while with a bland, sedative, kindly welcome. Her very silks were unruffled, and her spectacles brimful of tranquil benevolence.

"Is this Mr. Fitz Hugh?" she said in a quavering, pleasant voice. "I am very glad to see you. Mr. Westervelt will be in presently. Do sit down by me, and tell me all about our folks at Seacliff."

I could have kissed her hand with gratitude for the simple, friendly sympathy which seemed to exhale from her venerable presence, like perfume from a bunch of dried flowers. Drawing a chair beside hers, I discoursed with cheerful copiousness of the affairs and people of Seacliff, while she listened with a continual smile and a succession of little satisfied nods, and once looked particularly knowing and pleased, when I spoke of Miss Westervelt as Mary. Our conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a suit of black *drap d'été*, stiff and bolt upright with the person of Westervelt, senior.

"Ha! Mr. Fitz Hugh! there you are," said he, with his usual positiveness.

I admitted the charge by a bow, and, while he shook hands with me, smiled in my torments; with the constancy of a Pawnee at the stake.

"Glad to see you, sir," he continued. "You'll always be welcome, sir, in the house of Westervelt, senior. Dare say, though, you'd much rather be with one of the Westervelt, juniors, ha ha ha,—ha ha ha!"

He had a gigantic voice, disproportionately big for his small body, and a laugh of corresponding power, brazen and clamorous as a flourish of trombones. In short, he was a very resonant, sonorous old gentleman, who made noises as naturally as a bell or a cannon, and who perpetually reminded me, by some absurd process of association, of that war-horse described in Job, whose neck was clothed in thunder, and who said Ha ha! among the trumpets. It was curious to contrast this dry, wiry, abrupt, resounding, domineering man, with the white, bland, benignant, peaceful, purling dame with whose life his had been mingled for more than half a century.

The wilted, froze-and-thawed English waiter, soon announced that dinner was ready. Mrs. Westervelt took my arm, and we descended to the basement dining-room, while the senior drew his handkerchief and trumpeted behind us

like a mad elephant. Here was the same weighty oaken furniture as above, a well-spread table, plenty of old silver, a decanter of port, (as strong as poison,) a decanter of sherry, and a second English waiter, who looked like the first one padded. Mr. Westervelt said an emphatic grace, in which he blessed things abundantly, pretty much on his own responsibility. For some time the conversation lay chiefly between his wife and myself. Her warm old heart evidently went out on wings of love toward her offspring at Sealiff; and, as I was, if possible, still more interested there, we wheeled untiringly round the subject, like two birds round their nest. In the mean time her husband ate heartily and without much cumber of ceremony. He was clearly one of your strenuous old-fashioned people, who fight all novelties of custom and manner simply because they are novelties, and who, for instance, will die of starvation sooner than eat with a silver fork. His own three-tined one of steel was used boldly and commented on with ostentation. His taciturnity disappeared after he had moistened his Quincy granite with half a pint of that corrosive sublimate, labelled Port, and he struck into the dialogue with such a power and originality of execution that he very soon played a solo.

"My wife makes a deal of fuss about this little affair of yours, sir," said he. "One would take you to be the first man that ever fell in love. How women can interest themselves so furiously in such an old story as love-making, I can't imagine. But they do; they always do; they never get over it. There's my wife, sir; she's so old that I'm ashamed to name the figure; and yet she's as much tickled with your engagement as she was with her own."

Mr. Westervelt, like many other eccentric men, deficient in early social culture, was in the habit of making jokes at his wife's expense. She was neither offended at it nor embarrassed by it, but sat placidly listening and smiling, an obsequious worshipper of her spouse, and accustomed to endure all his changeful moods without a thought of retaliation or remonstrance.

"Now I, sir," he continued, "I have interested myself in the subject; but coolly, like a man of business. I have not had hysterics over the affair, but I have seen to it as carefully as I would to a cargo of tea. Sent down for your book last evening at seven o'clock, and made Mrs. W. read it through before she went to bed, to see what you could do in the writing line."

"No, my dear, I didn't read it through. But I read a good deal of it,—enough to like it very much. I read it till my eyes ached, and I had to stop."

"Till your spectacles ached," replied her husband; and then he laughed with the power of a full orchestra: it was evidently one of his best and oldest jokes. "Her eyes never ache, Mr. Fitz Hugh; it's always her spectacles; they are getting infirm, ha ha ha, ha ha ha!—Well, sir; that wasn't all. I sent off two clerks and my man John to inquire about you. Knew all about you before nine o'clock this morning. Knew all your rogueries and bad resorts, sir. When you came, I was all ready for you; could have tripped you up and confounded you in a minute, sir."

From all this, two conclusions appeared distinctly: first, that Westervelt, junior, had been to see his father about me and my suit, the evening previous; second, that the elder gentleman had taken the matter entirely into his own hands, and that his decision might be considered final. As that decision had been favorable to me, I was of course in the happiest frame, and listened to his boisterous humor with as smiling a reverence as if I were his wife.

"I'm glad the girl had sense enough to sack that Bob Van Leer," he resumed. "I detest those Van Leers. My son was a fool to marry one of the breed."

"Why, Mr. Westervelt!" pleaded his dame very meekly.

"I say he is a fool," affirmed Mr. Westervelt loudly. "I can't forgive him for it either. He's to blame for it, because he wasn't born a fool. He makes a fool of himself, Mrs. W.; look at all his speculations; every bull tosses him and every

bear hugs him. Why, he hasn't even the ability to govern his own household," stormed the old man, swelling up with the delightful consciousness that he governed his. "That family is in a bad way, what with drinking Van Leers and gambling Somervilles. It wants some one to rule it with a rod of iron. You are the man, sir; it's your duty. I hope you'll take firm hold and do what my son can't and won't,—turn out the whole mob of lazy, rascally men-about-town, and purify the family altar, sir,—shake up the old lares and what-de-ye-callems to their duty, sir!"





CHAPTER XXVII.

OPEN PLEASURES AND SECRET SORROWS.

AN hour of the next morning was consecrated to the selection of a diamond ring. How difficult I was to suit, and how fearful that the one I decided upon was not handsome enough, was not fashionable, would not please her! The little talisman made the journey short, and made all things among which I passed invisible, so that I seemed to arrive at Seacliff swifter than thought, unconscious of the cars, of the stations, of the landscape, or of any fellow-traveller beside the ticket-seeking conductor. At Rockford a change came over my enchantment in the shape of an ancient, jolting hack, which transported me with more noise than speed to the house of Pa Treat, where I awoke with some difficulty to the realities of washing and dressing.

At the garden gate of Seacliff I met Bob Van Leer. I was about to pass him with a customary nod, when I was arrested by the intense expression which transfigured his usually torpid visage. If the languid moon had suddenly shone out with the dazzling strength of the sun, I could hardly have been more surprised than I was to see in his face such a passion of reproach, and grief, and anger. I felt like a monstrous hypocrite when I asked him, with an assumption of innocence, "Bob, what's the matter?"

At first he did not speak, probably because he could not, for a tide of blood set into his cheeks and his features worked

violently, like the waters of a disturbed sea. He glanced successively at my feet, at the Sound, at the sky; then tore off a rose-branch and pulled it in pieces; then burst out on me in capitals.

“Oh! you don’t know what’s the matter. *You’re* mighty ignorant, all at once. *I* know what it is. What do *you* think? It’s *her*.” (With a wild fling of his hand toward the house.) “You know that it’s about *her*. What else do I care for? You’ve got her. So that’s what you’ve been staying here for! Why didn’t you tell me so before, and not let me go on making a fool of myself? Oh, it’s precious mean!”

Here his strong voice sank struggling down, like a dying gladiator while the tears forced their way through his thick eyelashes. Let us have pity for the simple souls that cannot adequately plead their own cause and utter their own sufferings, but stand before us with blind weeping or mere dumb, anguished silence. How little sympathy we are apt to accord them when they need and therefore deserve so much! Often since that moment has the woe-begone face which poor Robert wore risen up to haunt my hours of serenest content, and obtained a compassion which just then I could not afford. It is an accusing face, and seems to demand that I should render some stern verdict against myself, although in my heart I know that I am not guiltily the cause of its sorrow.

“Not mean, Bob!” said I. “You can’t be in earnest there. Come, you forget that you gave me liberty to ask for her; that you begged me to save her from Somerville,” I added, trying to smile it off.

“Oh! it’s mighty pretty to bring that up,” he replied, not in the least mitigated. “That’s mighty cunning, that is. But it don’t signify. No use talking. I’m going. I shan’t stay here. Take her and keep her. I shall quit this blasted place forever.”

He flung away from me and marched down the hill with great strides, not once looking back. I watched him for ten

seconds; it was all that I could grant to his grief in the selfishness of my joy; then I hurried into the house.

Miss Westervelt sat by a window, her face bent over a trifle of embroidery, her long eyelashes pencilling her cheek with little halos of fine shadow, and her blonde hair made golden by splashes of sunlight which fell upon it through the interstices of fluttering vine-leaves. She looked more than ever like a girlish Madonna, except that as I entered she blushed into a beauty beyond the possibilities of any pictured Mary. A smile and a little nod was all the salutation that I got or wanted. Seating myself on an ottoman near her, I watched her in silence until she looked up with another smile, half amused, half embarrassed, and asked, "Well, how do you do this afternoon? Is that what you are waiting for me to say?"

"I have seen your grandpapa," said I. "I have had a talk with Westervelt, senior."

"I hope you liked him," she replied, trying to laugh, but not succeeding well.

"He treated me very badly," I went on. "He seems to be a man of the severest character."

The color flew into her face, but she made no answer, and resumed her embroidery with an appearance of great industry and absorption.

"But he came round," I added. "I finally had to admit that he is the tenderest-hearted old gentleman that ever lived."

She threw down her work and burst into a fit of laughter that was almost convulsive; the blue veins in her neck and temples swelled, and the rosy blood bloomed from chin to forehead; she leaned back in her chair and tried to hide her face in her tiny, trembling fingers.

"He was obliged to have recourse to his handkerchief before I left him," I continued.

"Oh, don't make me laugh so!" she begged. "I can't help it; it's so ridiculous! Please don't cut jokes on my grandpapa."

“Well, listen then. I’ll tell you every word that was said; every word that I said to him, and every word that he said to me.”

“No, no! don’t do that!” she exclaimed, blushing again. “I won’t hear *all*; no, not *every* word.”

Little by little, however, I got out the whole story, very much as things actually happened. As any other woman would have done, she listened eagerly to the end, sometimes flushing as I recounted my confessions and declarations, sometimes laughing irrepressibly at her grandfather’s granitic responses. In my masculine inexperience and stupidity, I did not then comprehend that this merriment was more than half hysterical, and could not guess that, as soon as I left her, she would shut herself up in her room and give way to that necessity of over-excited womanhood, a hearty cry.

“I had just finished my tale when a servant brought in a large letter, enveloped in business-like drab, addressed to Miss Westervelt.

“Let me take the letter,” I said, when she had read it twice over and was about to put it away in her pocket.

“No, no! It is from grandpapa; it is private. I musn’t give it to you.”

Whether she gave it to me or not, I soon had it, and here it is.

“MISS MARY WESTERVELT:—

“Dear Grandchild,—Mr. Louis Fitz Hugh has called on me and requested your hand in marriage. I am pleased with his statements, as well as his appearance; and, from what I can learn concerning him, I infer that you have made a good choice and shown your usual discretion. Your father having left me to decide concerning the acceptance of Mr. Fitz Hugh’s suit, I take pleasure in saying that I see no sufficient objection to it, and that I shall be happy to welcome him into our family. I must inform you, however, that his income is small, and that, if you marry him, you must make

up your mind to economy. But this will be all the better for you. I should despise a girl who would draw back from a marriage on this account. Economy is not only a virtue, but a talent; and you ought to be proud to show that you are capable of it.

“Seize an early opportunity to visit us, and bring Genevieve with you. My girlish old wife is frightfully excited about your affair, and wants to talk a great deal of soft nonsense to you under the name of good advice. I am debating whether to send her to a boarding-school or a lunatic asylum.

“Present our respectful regards to Mr. Fitz Hugh, and our usual remembrances to the family.

“Yours affec.

“J. WESTERVELT.”

“A remarkably sensible letter,” said I; “although the first half sounds as if it must have been written at the counting-house.”

“One of the kindest letters,—the very kindest,—that we ever got from grandpapa,” she murmured, looking happy and grateful.

I quietly imprisoned the hand that was extended to receive the bit of paper; and before she could withdraw it, the ring, the jewelled circlet of promise, was on the engagement finger.

“How resolved you are!” she tried to speak, but could only whisper. “Oh! I hope you will never repent of it.”

It never once occurred to me as singular that we should be left alone for two hours or more, until a noise of wheels and voices announced that the rest of the family had returned from some excursion.

“They have been to the fair at Rockford,” explained Mary.

“Why didn’t you go!” I inquired, smiling, perhaps conceitedly.

“You are very saucy. You think that I stayed because

I expected you," she replied, blushing. "I wanted to finish this work, you see."

"Oh! how glad I am that you didn't lose the fair on my account," I observed.

"Are you offended?" she asked, raising her eyes quickly. "I will tell you why I stayed, some day."

"But the ring," said I, remembering that she had not once looked at it. "Does it please you? I will exchange it."

"Oh, no! don't exchange it," she answered, glancing at it hastily as if frightened to see it there. "It is beautiful. One large stone. I like it a great deal better than a cluster. It is such a pretty ring."

I fancy that almost every young man is anxious about the style of his engagement ring, and that every true-hearted, loving girl admires hers, no matter what its fashion.

Mrs. Westervelt seemed to divine our secret immediately that she entered the room, notwithstanding that I saluted her with a solemn politeness which I thought the perfection of dissimulation. Perhaps she caught a glimpse of the telltale ring, for women are quick in spying out objects of that nature. Giving me a slight pressure of the hand in passing, she advanced smilingly to Mary, kissed her, and then, without a word, tripped out of the parlor. Her cheek grew girlish again with color, and the weary expression so common on her face gave way to a look of happy sympathy, which seemed to lift ten years off her forehead and much sin off her soul.

Genevieve showed the same instinctive recognition of what had happened, but in a different way. She gave us a side glance through the door as she passed it, but turned quickly when Mary raised her eyes toward her, and hurried up stairs without nodding or speaking. I believe that most young and impressible natures dread to exchange the first look with a loved familiar face which has just been touched, and, as it were, transformed by a new and mighty emotion, a solemn

and eternal vow. Let no one wonder that the two girls cried together before they went to sleep; for love had made them one ever since they were children; and here, suddenly, was something which divided them, so that they could never more see to each other all that they had been.

Next came Mrs. Van Leer; bold, self-possessed, gay, flip-sant: the feminine impersonation of sounding brass and tinkling cymbals; never had her low-necked conversation and manner struck me so disagreeably. Entering with flirt and flutter of ostentatiously displayed embroidery, she made a low mock courtesy, and then, handing her parasol to Somerville, sank languishingly on the sofa, while the wrought kirts were artistically disordered. Next it was, "I am dying of heat. Do fan me, Mr. Somerville. Why isn't my husband here to do it. Mr. Fitz Hugh, if you ever *should* marry, do try to love your wife better than your hor—ses."

She threw off her scarf presently, exposing her neck and shoulders. She had a passion for low dresses, which she ratified on every occasion sanctioned by fashion, and to the most dizzying verge of propriety. Hoydenish, thoughtless, vain, and knowing well, I suppose, that her form was handsomer than her face, she could not be contented unless the world had at least a suspicion of the grace which a cruel civilization insisted on obscuring. She leaned her head on her hand now, and her elbow on a scroll of the sofa, regardless of the position and glances of Somerville. He stood near her, almost touching her bare arm, plying the fan with an air of assiduous politeness, but bending on her a long steady stare, so sensual and at the same time so contemptuous, that if she had seen it, I think she would have drawn away from him in both fear and anger. Probably Mary did not understand what I understood, but fearing that she might, and wishing to release her from such a scene, I bade her good evening.

It was not till the next morning that I saw Mr. Westert. He walked out to the garden gate to meet me, and

shook both my hands with an earnestness which really seemed a little like good-will. "Well!" he smiled, "I find that everything is settled. I am most happy to welcome you as a member of my family. I am satisfied—that is to say, gratified with the course things have taken; though, as you perhaps perceived, it was at first a surprise to me. But walk in, sir, walk in; you will find them all there."

He was willing to be polite to me, it seems, for lack of ability to get rid of me. Had Westervelt, senior, bribed him for me with a loan or an indorsement, or had he drifted over to my side on the languid, timorous current of his own feebleness?

Henry Van Leer was smoking his three consecutive after-breakfast cigars in the veranda. The others were in the parlor; the two married ladies discussing the figures of a quadrille; Somerville talking Ruskin to Mary, who listened unresponsively, and as if at a great distance; Robert seeking revenge for his rejection, according to the immemorial stupid custom of disappointed lovers, by paying loud and ostentatious court to Genevieve. At sight of me seating myself beside Mary, the poor fellow's assumed bravery departed, his fine bass voice faltered into silence, and he unobservedly melted from our presence. He had fallen from his paradise, poor Robert; the flaming swords were shining in the gate; and he must wander away. In the last afternoon train of that day he took his eternal departure from Seacliff, carrying with him, I doubt not, a portmanteau of sorrows, big enough to fill any baggage-car of any supposable spiritual railroad. How many people pass us daily in the world, laden with heavy burdens which few can see and none can unloose! Of all his fellow passengers, was there one who, glancing over the young fellow's expressionless broad face and burly frame, divined that under his gray travelling waistcoat of latest fashion there lay a heart of which the pulsations were like the throbs of a wound?

"I'm bound for Europe," said he, wofully smiling at us from the carriage. "I don't know as I shall ever see any of you again. Good-bye, all. Good-bye, Mary."

He was so sad, so humble, so forgiving, when he thus put out his hand for the last time, that she turned pale and looked conscience-stricken as if she had done him some wrong. I know that after him went forth soft wings of pity, which would have veiled his past and borne him into some happy future, if kindness were omnipotence. When he disappeared beneath the brow of the hill, she glided soberly into the house alone. I did not follow her immediately, but stopped to talk with Genevieve, who, having seen Robert off with extreme indifference, was about to take a course of novel-reading in one of the grape-arbors. She could look me in the face now, and she began gayly upon the engagement.

"Come in, brother Louis. So you have got my sister at last? Don't you think it was mean in you to cut out poor Robert? Why didn't you ask for me, who had no beau?"

"Because you don't want a beau. Because you are too young for such things."

"Young? Nonsense! I am not so much younger than Mary. I am seventeen, and she is only nineteen. You think then that I am too young to love, or to be loved, by a man of your prodigious maturity?"

"Exactly; just my humble opinion; don't you agree to it?"

"No, sir!" she answered with amusing indignation. "I am old enough to appreciate,—yes, to love,—a man of twice your years and brains."

My old suspicion that she was interested in Somerville returned, at least to my memory.

"It is no compliment to your own brains if you are doing it," I said, watching her closely.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, while the spirit of Westervelt, senior, flashed out of her blue-gray eyes, "Do you mean to say that I *am* in love with any person much older than you? You are not my brother-in-law yet.

You have no right to pry into my secrets,—supposing I have any.”

“Genevieve, I do not pry into them. If they come to my knowledge, it is because you expose them by your own actions. You cast them before me,—like pearls before swine, I suppose you would say.”

“No, no! I don’t do that, do I?” she replied hastily. “You don’t mean to say that people suspect me of being —?”

“Of being fascinated with Somerville?” I concluded the sentence for her.

“No, not *that!*” she said, scowling as if at something repulsive. “You don’t mean seriously to say that you suspect me of *that?*”

“Genevieve, I don’t mean to say anything unkind to you. I like you very much, and wish you every happiness. I dislike Somerville excessively, and believe him to be a wicked man. I did once suspect you of being influenced by him, and I want you to make me happy by telling me that I was mistaken.”

“Look here,” she said, with childlike simplicity, as if she were about to take her heart out of her breast and show it to me. “When Mr. Somerville first began to visit us here, before you came, I used to like him very well. Why, it was quite natural. He is a handsome man and a very fascinating man; and, although he is thirty-seven, he does not look thirty. Then too, there was no one else to think about. Poor Robert was dead in love with sister, and besides, he was not clever enough to suit me, though he is a good soul and I am sorry for him. So it was to be expected that I should fancy the society of Mr. Somerville, and should think him a very attractive gentleman. But that is all gone by; yes, long ago; two months, three months ago. Mary beat it out of me. She could not bear him, and could not bear to have me talk to him. Mary is wonderfully clever, I can tell you: wise as a serpent, if she is harmless as a dove: you needn’t think

that you have got a simpleton whom you can twist around your finger. She has helped me out of many little scrapes; and she kept me from getting into this big one. So you may be perfectly tranquil about me on the score of Mr. Somerville. I know a great deal more about him than you do, and I dislike him worse than you possibly can. If I were papa," she added, nodding her head repeatedly and emphatically, "if I were papa, I would not have such a man here; I would put him out of the house before night, bag and baggage."

"I am much obliged to you, dear Genevieve," said I, giving her hand a brotherly kiss. "You are very kind in being so frank to me."

"Well, go along now and talk to sister.—Console her for the loss of Robert," she called as I mounted the steps.

Poor Robert! By the next evening I was installed in that very room where he had so often listened with drowsy delight to the indistinct murmur of Mary's voice in the opposite chamber.

Now came two or three days during which Mrs. Van Leer and Somerville flirted perpetually. It was a wonder to me that her husband did not notice it; but he was doubly shielded from suspicion by a good conscience and a stupid brain. Mrs. Westervelt watched the two triflers gravely at times, but not with a seeming of jealousy. The suspicion crossed my mind that she had got wearied of Somerville's influence, whatever its nature might be, and was glad to see him diverted from herself, at no matter what cost to others. Mary and Genevieve treated him with a daily increasing coldness, which he pretended not to notice. His bearing toward the girls had changed greatly since my arrival at Seaclyff; then he was polite, indeed, but blandly patronizing and almost parental: now he affected profound respect and the very humility of gallantry. With Mrs. Westervelt he rarely talked much in the house, but occasionally walked with her in the garden, always apart, glancing around to see if any

one were near, gentle in tone and gesture, but with transient gleams of cruelty in his look. So full of pain and fear and desperation was her face as she listened, that at times she could not compose it to meet us, but had to leave him and hurry off alone.

Amid all this earnestness of inexpressible passion, this love and hatred and despair and woe, Mrs. Van Leer continued her unmeaning, purposeless, doll-like coquetries. Twenty-seven years old as she was, the woman's heart had not yet reached the age of puberty. But the current of emotion which was flowing stronger and stronger, daily through the family life, influenced even her so far as to make her show forth one feeling of respectable vigor; a sarcastic pettishness toward Mary and myself began to flavor her soda-water conversation. I had never given her thin, frothy character credit for possessing such a body of spleen, such a rich bouquet of sauce. Whether her spiteful manner resulted from the malicious incitations of Somerville, or from personal indignation at me, because I had left the shrine where her plump shoulders and neat ankles demanded worship, I would not dare to decide.

One morning Mary was confined to her room by a violent headache, and therefore my stay in the parlor had been wearisome dulness and abstraction. We were a divided family now, with separate secrets, separate suspicions and purposes, responding to no common sympathy, and always failing when we tried to open a general conversation. Mrs. Westervelt was in the veranda with her cousin Henry; Mrs. Van Leer giggled and chattered infinite platitudes to Somerville on the sofa in the front parlor; Genevieve sat near me, embroidering soberly, and only now and then disturbing my languor with some torpid, dreamy reminiscence of Europe. Thus I journeyed for more than an hour in one of those subjective accommodation-trains that we call a reverie, gazing idly out of the windows of my spirit car, and conscious occasionally that my eyes had rested for a good while on Mrs.

Van Leer. She, too, seemed to notice it, and exchanged several whispers with Somerville, intermixed with quick defiant glances at me. Finally he left her, came smilingly to Genevieve, and asked if she would do him the favor to take a turn with him in the veranda.

"No, thank you," was her cool reply. "I must go and sit with Mary. Good-night, Louis."

She went up stairs directly, and he sauntered away alone. As soon as the room was clear of listeners, Mrs. Van Leer came at me with a look which was quite equivalent to a box on the ear.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh," she said, sneeringly, "you behave a little too much like a police detective. You have been watching me all this evening."

"Not at all," replied I, indignant at the charge. "I shall leave that arduous duty to your husband."

"He has no need of watching me," she whispered, reddening from chin to forehead. "How gallant you are! I really must compliment you on your stock of impudence."

"Oh, Madame!" said I, "and I am so far your inferior!"

She tried to reply, but her anger choked her into a fit of coughing; and at last, turning short, she rustled out of the parlor and away to her bedroom. From that hour Mrs. Van Leer and I were on terms of the most intimate disagreement. She could never keep her feeble anger to herself, but, like all shallow saucepans, boiled over, stormy with steam and bubble, on the slightest provocation.

In the mean time I knew, although I saw them not, that there were plenty of secret tears in the life of Seaclyff. Have you never walked in early morning through summer woods, and heard dew-drops fall, one by one, separately, slowly, behind you, on either side, before you, without seeing one in its descent, nor being able to note the bough from which it parted? Or have you not heard a mournful sighing of wind among the tree-tops in a particular spot, and, on reaching it, found the branches all stiffened again, and the leaves

motionless? There are passings without footsteps; invisible presences and audible vanishings; voices which, when you listen to them turn to silence. You think almost that there are spirits in the air who mock you, or who long to communicate with you and cannot. Just so vague and transitory were the signs of misery that I could detect in the existence around me. In distant rooms I heard tones sharp with anger or broken with dejection, but could not tell positively whose they were, nor why they thus thrilled with passion. The lids that drooped at my approach, as if to hide tears, were raised in a moment from eyes full of calmness and seeming merriment. People who walked slowly, pensively, and sadly together, quickened their footsteps at the sound of mine, and, smiling in my face, gathered bouquets for me. I could see all this now that I knew the mystery, although, before, the same things had passed athwart my vision invisible.

At last I resolved that I had a right to question Mary concerning this miserable secret, and learn its exact nature, so that I might go to work advisedly to break its cruel hold upon the family. She admitted that there was a mystery, but she implored me earnestly not to ask her to reveal it; and when I insisted, she calmly told me that just now she could do me only one kindness, and that was to free me. Of course I got quite indignant at this offer; and so she laid her head against my shoulder and cried. I had just begged a reconciliation and tranquillized her, when we heard wheels and a voice that sounded like Robert's.

"Is it possible?" I laughed. "Has Bob's eternity ended?"

We ran to the window and looked down the pathway. There, sure enough, was Bob, waving his Kossuth hat toward us, and trying to hide some little shame at his faint-hearted return under a bravado of cheery running and shouting. His full chest had not hollowed perceptibly, nor had his broad face shrunk, nor his thick, brown locks whitened. Behind him came a hackman and his subaltern, staggering under the two enormous trunks which a week before had been so solemnly

and laboriously packed for a residence of a cycle or two in Europe.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Bob, beaming upon us with mingled joy and sheepishness, like the sun shining through a fog. "How d'ye do, Mary? How are you, old feller? Well, I couldn't go it, nohow. I had to come back. I s'pose you an't glad to see me, though."

"Oh, yes we are, Robert," said Mary, shaking both his hands, and laughing kindly in his anxious face. "I am delighted to see you, and so will the rest be. We missed you, Robert."

"That's you, Mary! that's you. You are a real good girl, you are, and it's very kind of you,—God bless you, Mary!"

The tears came into the big brown eyes again; and he stood staring at her with the fond look of a good dog who watches his master; not a particle of egotistic reserve in it, but all humility, adoration, and self-sacrifice. After paying the hack over-generously, he dropped into a chair and told his story, so brief, so melancholy, so laughable! He had taken passage for Liverpool, in a packet, hoping to prevent consumption by the long voyage; but had lost his courage off Sandy Hook, forfeited his money, and returned to New York in the tug-boat. The next morning, unable to keep away from Seacliff any longer, he had, as he phrased it, "come back to make friends with us all, and ask pardon for his foolishness." He presently brought out a handsome set of Neapolitan corals for Mary, and then made her laugh and blush together by begging that he might be one of her bridesmaids—no, confound it! groomsmen. His square jaw dropped a quarter of an inch when he learned that I had taken his room, but he would not hear to my leaving it, and immediately set about installing himself in my old apartment at Pa Treat's.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

TRYING TO BELL THE CAT.

RECEIVED a letter in a yellow envelope, evidently of counting-house origin, and directed in the high, strong handwriting of Westervelt, senior. Breaking a vast seal, so broad and red that it made me think of the front of a brick store, I laid wondering eyes on the following pugnacious epistle.

“MR. FITZ HUGH:

“Dear Sir,—I find that my son has not yet turned out that rascally Somerville, and dares not do it. I beg and insist that you take immediate measures to send him adrift, even if you and the gardener have to kick him off. He is such a notorious, dirty rogue that his mere presence is enough to ruin the name of a decent family; and, in addition, I find that he has set afloat some scandalous stories concerning my son's wife. Oust him *instantly*. Break his bones if necessary. I will pay all damages. My son, by my desire, will be at Sealiff to-morrow, and will support you with his authority, whatever that may amount to.

“Very Respect^{ly} Yours,

“J. WESTERVELT.”

Here was a lively prospect. I should have to fight not only Somerville, a host in himself, but Mrs. Van Leer and

Perhaps Mrs. Westervelt. I had the girls, to be sure; and the father would arrive to aid me with his feebleness; but what these fragile natures amounted to, the whole summer had been witness; they had longed for months to drive Somerville away, and had not dared attempt it. Indeed, the longer I thought of the man's astounding impudence in sticking to a household where he was so suspected and hated, the more likely it seemed that he would fight a desperate battle, and sell us a victory that would perhaps ruin the Westervelt name. After a long cogitation, it seemed best to see him alone, with the object of getting him out of the fortress by diplomacy; and so, touching his arm as we dispersed from the dinner-table, I requested in a whisper that he would grant me a few moments of private conversation. Assenting with civil leer, he followed me to my room, threw himself on the sofa, lit a cigar, and waited my pleasure, smoking with the most urbane tranquillity. I also took a few whiffs at a cheroot, feeling that I needed some occupation of that sort to hide my agitation.

"Mr. Somerville," I said at last, "I am afraid you would think it quite odd if I should ask you what you are staying here for."

"You are a wonderfully clever person, Mr. Fitz Hugh," he replied, assuming the offensive. "You have a natural tact for divining people's feelings. I *should* think it quite odd, as you say; and moreover, I should be tempted to consider the question slightly rustic."

"Nevertheless, I venture to put it. Certain strong reasons oblige me to."

"There are no reasons that oblige me to answer," said he. "Still, out of pure good nature,—out of mere sheer benignity, observe—I will try to gratify you. I am staying here, then; first because I have been invited to stay; second, because I choose to stay. Any more inquiries to make?" he continued, becoming a little insolent and common in his manner. "Don't restrain your curiosity out of regard to my

feelings; they are too tough to be punctured by interrogation points. As for politeness, that is a mere triviality, not worth our attention, eh?"

"You are not perhaps aware," I resumed, without noticing his sneers, "that your presence has given rise to reports injurious to the character of one of the ladies of the family."

"Not in the least. How shocking! My dear friend, you pain me horribly. Don't repeat that, I beseech you, as you value my peace of mind."

"Such reports exist, and I beg you to consider the fact seriously and in the manner of a gentleman," I went on. "Your only honorable course, it seems to me, is to leave the house and keep away from it."

"Pshaw! nonsense! Come, be a man, Fitz Hugh. Let us despise the tittle-tattle of a weak world. Our consciences are pure as new milk, are they not? To be sure, we have both flirted a little with Cousin Jule; but, after all, we have kept our innocence. I shall remain and defy slander, *sotto l'osbergo di sentirmi puro.*"

"And I, on the other hand, shall be obliged to urge your departure," said I. "Don't be astonished, and don't laugh: it is a very plain case, and I am quite in earnest. Seriously, Mr. Somerville, I must beg you to pack your trunk and be off in a quiet way as soon as possible."

"Upon my honor you are a cool one," he replied, throwing down his cigar and fixing a broad stare on me. "Upon my soul I can't be angry with you, it is so supremely ridiculous. What the devil gives you the right to govern the house in this style?"

"Of course I speak as the future son-in-law of Mr. Westervelt."

He took out his cigar-case, selected another regalia, lighted it, and drew a few puffs, all with an air of placid pensiveness.

"Fitz Hugh," he said at last, "I beg pardon,—I don't wish to hurt your feelings,—but I can't help wondering that you

engaged yourself to this young lady, handsome and amiable as she is. You are not aware, perhaps, that to a young man of your person, manners, family, and other advantages, it is easy to approach girls in other ways than by marriage."

I felt the blood simmer in my forehead, and rose with a menace which was half involuntary; but he merely waved his hand deprecatingly, not offering to defend himself; and so I could not strike him.

"I am not alluding to Miss Westervelt," he said. I spoke of girls in general. You hardly intend to champion the whole sex, I presume. Did you suppose that I was alluding to Miss Westervelt? What did you imagine that I could possibly have to say against her? Do you think that I would repeat any scandal of her, if I knew of one? You are entirely mistaken if that is your judgment of me."

"Somerville, be careful of yourself. You know nothing against Miss Westervelt; and if you intimate that you do, I will throw you out of the window."

When I made this disagreeable remark, so indicative in general of an unhappy temper, I was in such a passion that I could not hold my hands still, but kept twirling a mahogany chair on its legs as if it were a top.

"I am silent," he returned, drawing a sneer so fine that it was almost invisible.

He watched me steadily all the while, and seeing now, perhaps, that I was coming to the white heat of anger, he dropped his libellous insinuations, and resumed the jesting tone with which he had opened the conversation.

"So I am compromising Cousin Jule by my visits here, am I? Why, Mr. Fitz Hugh, you might as well blame a goose for compromising the fox that steals him. Doesn't she triumph over me? Doesn't she run away with me? Isn't it a case of simple man-stealing? Answer me that, my dear sir, you who have suffered in like manner."

"It is not Mrs. Van Leer," I replied, slowly, "It is Mrs. Westervelt."

He sat up all at once, and for a moment stared at me anxiously, with a deeper sincerity in his eyes than I had ever seen in them before; but in ten seconds more he had frozen over again, and lay there as cold and calm and passionless as a New Hampshire lake in midwinter.

"Impossible, Mr. Fitz Hugh!" said he, knocking the ash off his cigar. "This is a serious affair, really. But you must be mistaken; there cannot be any such unfortunate reports as you speak of; the world, stupid as it is, would not point so entirely in the wrong direction."

"There are such reports," I replied, infuriated by his talk about "the wrong direction." "And the long and short of it is, Somerville, that you ought to go, and you shall go, and go directly. I will give you till to-morrow noon to get away."

His eyes sparkled now, and for the first time in our acquaintance I saw a quick flame spring into his pale olive cheek, for in general his visage was fire-proof, and he never blushed. "Young man," said he, "you will oblige me by discontinuing this jest. It has an impertinent look, and there is not wit enough in it to make it endurable. I give you fair warning that if you don't drop the subject, I will make you repent of it."

"The subject cannot be dropped as long as you remain here," I replied instantly. "I must insist on your departure to-morrow. And if you won't leave the house of your own accord, I give you my word that I will put you out by force."

"Damn your insolence!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet and advancing a step toward me. "Damn you! what do you mean by this?"

I stood up and met him half way, the heavier man of the two by a dozen pounds, full as muscular, and, I believe, a good deal more combative.

"Absurd!" he muttered, constraining himself and falling back on the sofa, while the icy smile stole over his face again although his hands trembled. "Can't we settle this without making Yankee Sullivans of ourselves? I beg pardon for

the word insolence:—a damning, you know, is no insult. Now then, what right have you to banish me in this despotic style? This house belongs to Mrs. Westervelt; it is her income which pays the housekeeping expenses; and it is by her invitation that I am here. I have long been her friend, and I was her lawyer for years. Is it by her authority that you order me off in this cavalier fashion? And where is Mr. Westervelt all the while? Where is the natural and legal man of the house?"

I remained silent a moment, questioning whether I should prove his guilt to his face by telling him what I had overheard of his private conversations with Mrs. Westervelt, and by showing him the scandalous narrative, allusive to her, which he had dictated to the Reporter. But I was unwilling to expose myself to a charge of eavesdropping; I disliked equally to push my needy literary friend into hostilities with this unscrupulous scoundrel; and, besides, how absurd to make an appeal to a seared conscience and a shameless soul! Falling back on the letter of Westervelt, senior, I handed it to him, saying, "There is my authority."

If the reader will please to take another glance at that vigorous missive, he can easily imagine, I think, the suffocating disgust and wrath of the "dirty rogue," as he read it. He bore the torture like a martyr, however, only turning ghastly white, as he glanced over the evil epithets and the order for his ignominious expulsion, and uttering no word until he had handed back the letter. Then his wicked laugh burst forth, lifting the short upper lip, and exposing those two long front teeth, which gleamed like tusks through his moustache.

"I will teach Westervelt, senior,—I will teach the whole rabble of you, that I am not to be driven," he cried, huskily. "I could crush this family. I have it in my power. I could drive it from society. From this time—all of you—keep silent! leave me alone! or I will make you wish yourselves in hell. As for you, my lad, you and your gardener, I warn

you not to lay a finger on me. I carry pistols, and I swear to God that I will be the death of you if you touch me. And now—lastly—once for all—I tell you that I will stay here as long as you stay—as long as I choose. Do you hear me?—understand me?”

He made me think of an enraged tiger, he was so handsome, so graceful, and at the same time looked so devilishly wicked and cruel. The contrast between his usual smooth gentility of demeanor, and his present animal ferocity was immense and stupefying. People who have only known the man as a sublimated fashionable of fascinating manners and conversation, who have merely seen him jesting at table, or smiling through a drawing-room, would find it hard to believe that he had in him so much of the wild beast. His voice was scarcely human, and his features swollen, in this moment of full liberty that he had granted to his passions. He attempted no violence, however, and made no gesture of attack, but only glared on me a moment, and then left the room before I could recover my wits to act or answer.

The interview had been far more lively than agreeable or satisfactory. I had been villainously defied and baffled; and in return I had only been able to insult Somerville; that is to say, supposing I could insult such an invulnerable black-guard; for when a man is already in the gutter, it is clearly impossible to kick him down stairs. I paced my room for an hour, revolving various plans for getting rid of him, but discovering no better expedient than the shoulder-hitting idea of Westervelt, senior. Downright fisticuffs, however, I would reserve to the last extremity; and, meantime, I would keep silence concerning both the altercation and its causes. I judged from the quiet air which pervaded the family during the day, that Somerville had thought best to observe a similar discretion. We silently enjoyed our secret, and only looked sheathed daggers at each other. It occurred to me that I had probably gained for myself that exceedingly rare distinction, so often imagined but so seldom realized, a life-long

enemy ; but the thought gave me no uneasiness, for youth does not dread combats, and, to save the Westervelts, I would have provoked a vigilance committee of enemies. The fear that he could disgrace that name it was, that chiefly troubled me, and made me hesitate to serve my proposed ejection on him. Such a profligate desperado would not stick at any libel, however atrocious or self-condemnatory ; and the viler the slander, the more greedily would it be swallowed by all the simple and all the scurvy portion of humanity. And then, what could I say in defence of Mrs. Westervelt ? What could she say in defence of herself ?

Her husband came at six of the afternoon. I guessed that he had delayed his arrival through dread of the coming crisis, but he said that he had been too late for the previous train, which was also characteristic, and therefore probable. He colored when Somerville offered his hand, but he shook the hand, and stammered, " Pretty well, I thank you." Then the flush fled from his thin cheeks, and he turned deathly pale, as his wife came forward from her boudoir, and put up her white lips for his kiss. His children he embraced so tremulously and passionately, that the daughters stared at him with a vague, timid questioning in their blue eyes, while little Willie asked, outright, " Papa, what the matter ?"

" Nothing,—nothing, Willie,—papa's business," he muttered ; and looked the picture of conscious guilt rather than of injured innocence.

The family meal of that evening was a sorry occasion. Mr. Westervelt ate nothing, said nothing, and soon left the table to go and sit in the nursery alone with his little boy. Mary and Genevieve were silent, observant and evidently anxious, although as yet they could hardly have been aware that the hollow which had long muttered under their feet was yawning into an abyss. Henry Van Leer had gone to New York, and Robert was at his new boarding-place. Mrs. Van Leer, entirely ignorant and unsuspecting, talked on in a jesting way, which grated painfully upon the rest of us, who

were removed as by a great gulf from her frivolous hilarity. Somerville showed a calmness that was insolent, and a gayety that was brutal; absorbing great part of the conversation, and speaking in his fullest, firmest, most musical tones; laughing frequently, and showing the hateful glare of his two long front teeth through his moustache. He did not address himself to Mrs. Westervelt directly, but he seemed bent on quelling her agitation by the magnetism of his audacious manner, having informed her, doubtless, of the situation of things, and laid his orders upon her to wear a face of unconcern. She did her best: she looked no one in the eye; she could do no more. It is a strange, shocking thing to see the face of one whom you have esteemed growing whiter and whiter as you gaze on it, and to believe that it is a vampyre of remorse at the heart, which is sucking the blood away from the cheeks so ravenously.

After tea, Mrs. Westervelt was called into the nursery, and I did not see her again until next morning. About nine o'clock, her husband appeared in the hall, pacing it from end to end, silently, ghost-like, his shoulders bent, his hands clutched together behind him, and his head bowed in utter dejection. At the end of what seemed to me an hour, although less than half that probably, he beckoned me to him, and, without waiting for me or speaking, turned up-stairs, dragging himself along wearily by the balusters, entering my room, locked the door behind us, and flung himself on the sofa. His heart was beating the breath out of him, I know; for, when he spoke, it was like one who has been running violently.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh—I wanted to see you—I suppose you know why," he began, in short gasps. "There have been reports—against my wife. They are false—false! I have just had a long—conversation with her. I assure you—I do beg you to believe—that they are falsehoods—wicked falsehoods. She may have been imprudent. No no!—she has not been even that. They are lies from end to end. She

has told me the whole truth, I am convinced. I know her better than any one. I can—I know that I can—confide in her.”

He was obliged to stop for a moment, and draw a long breath to cool the heated blood that was choking in his lungs.

“I am quite sure,” said I, “that Mr. Somerville is the author of these slanders; and I am sure, also, that he is capable of any falsehood.”

“Yes yes—a great liar,” he answered, eagerly. “But have you thought—has it never occurred to you—that these stories might refer to some one else; to—some Rockford lady—or, perhaps, to Mrs. Van Leer?”

“I am sorry to say that I fear not. I received a note, to-day, from your father, stating expressly that the calumnies affect Mrs. Westervelt, and that Somerville is the calumniator. Your father is a very accurate person, I believe.”

“Yes yes,” he moaned. “He told me the same thing. But, I thought it might be a fancy—a strong expression of his. If he has written it——.”

“I have another proof as to the personal identities,” I continued. “Here is a libel which I got from an old school-mate of mine, who, I am sorry to say, has to make his living by picking up items for the New York Tattler. Somerville dictated it to him, in payment, ostensibly, for favors in the way of lunches, cigars, &c., but really, perhaps, for some bad object, which my friend could not guess. I secured it in time to prevent its publication.”

I handed him the unfinished bit of defamation which here follows:—

“Fashionable Immorality.”

“The saints of Gotham will be grieved, and the sinners wickedly delighted to learn that low life is creeping up-stairs in our *beau monde*. Being saintly ourselves, we regret to hear, on the best authority, that one of our most fascinating ‘gay Lotbarios’ and diner’s-out has encountered another *bonne fortune* in the aristocratic circles of New York. The

frail fair one is of a race distinguished for its dollars, and the name which she now bears is fairly fragrant with bank-notes, railroad-bonds, and other flowers of fortune. Great is money in this moral city of ours, but the wealth of the East cannot buy back lost virtue.

"Lady has an uninteresting husband; is in the flower of age, lively and handsome; supports Lothario; gives him her watches, rings, and laces to sell; has been seen with him at Saratoga and Newport; is now with him at a country-house in the land of steady habits. Affair commenced in 18—.

(Two squares, at least; usual fat jokes; quotation from Don Juan.)

"Mr. Fitz Hugh, this is villainous!" exclaimed Mr. Westervelt, springing up, and pacing the room. "Villainous! villainous!" he repeated, unconsciously tearing the paper to shreds.

"Villainous indeed!" I answered. "But not necessarily true, whoever it was meant for. I am confident that Somerville is one of the greatest liars breathing."

"Why didn't you show this to me before?" he asked, turning upon me angrily. "How long have you had it? How could you keep this from me when it affected me so? I would have turned him out,—turned him out."

"Please observe," said I, "that there are no names mentioned. There are details which apply to your family, but which would apply also to other families. Even the Reporter did not know who the lady was. How could I come to you with such a vague slander, and say 'That affects you!' You would have asked me for proofs, and I should have had none. This paper shows nothing certainly but that Somerville is capable of propagating slanders."

"Oh! what won't he say!" he exclaimed, throwing himself anew on the sofa, and covering his face with his hands. When he spoke again, it was to ask what his father advised.

“To turn him out; of course to turn him out; by force, if necessary.”

“Well—yes, he shall go. I will exert my authority. I *will*. I will not have him here. It will seem strange. It will make a great scandal. But he shan’t stay. I will not be so tormented and disgraced.”

Silent a while longer, he at last rose to go, saying earnestly and pleadingly, “I can rely upon you, then? You will support me? You won’t forsake us?”

“I will stand by you,” I affirmed, giving him my hand. He shook it, wrung it, seemed to hang upon it; then took out his handkerchief and wept while I unlocked the door.

“Good-night, my good friend,” he sobbed, and walked away on tiptoe.

I followed him in a few minutes, but he had gone to his room for the night. Somerville’s mellow tones and Mrs. Van Leer’s constant laughter came in through the open windows from the deepest shadows cast by the garden thickets. The girls were in the hall, listening to Bob’s second edition of his voyage to Sandy Hook. This was pretty nearly the condition of things until within an hour of midnight, when Robert took himself off, dragging Somerville along with him for walking company. Mrs. Van Leer joined us, and began to tease Genevieve to sleep with her, pleading that she couldn’t sleep alone, wasn’t used to it, didn’t dare to, and shouldn’t close her eyes without Jenny’s aid and comfort.

“But if I go with you, then Mary will be lonely,” says Genevieve, who did not care to leave her sister because, perhaps, they had confidences to interchange.

“Oh no, she won’t. She isn’t afraid. Besides, she is in the main body of the house. Now my room is in the wing, and robbers can get in so easy!”

“Quite an inducement for me to be there,” was the reply.

“Oh! but two of us, you know;—that’s so different from one. Come, now,—I shan’t sleep a wink unless I have somebody with me. I just lie and look at the win—dows. Come,

Jenny, that's a good girl,—do stay with me. Now, why won't you? You always have when Henry has been away. Now, Jenny, do, please!"

So at last Jenny did please, somewhat poutingly, and Cousin Jule carried her off, as the troublesome fairy in the story-book carries off the unwilling beauty. Somerville returning soon after, the house was closed, and we went our respective ways to pillows which for that night were stuffed with thorns rather than poppies. For my part, knowing that I could not sleep, I merely threw off my coat, seated myself by the window, and looked at the Sound, which had swooned away to perfect rest, and gleamed majestic, ocean-like, shoreless through the misty gauze of moonlight. There is something tranquillizing to a disturbed spirit in long contemplation of vast and peaceful expanses of nature. The heavy trials which have weighed upon us all day, the terrors that seemed to hide the heavens from us, grow light, grow small, rise from us and float afar, minute as motes of dust, in that sense of immensity and eternity, which insensibly streams over the mind from gigantic stretches of sea, and from heavens filled with shining hosts innumerable. Unquestionably there were others in that house who needed a mightier consolation, and who sought it, not indirectly through nature, but directly from the All-Father. I felt sure that my dear little girl, alone in her room, was kneeling and praying, with anguished pleading of spirit, with tears, doubtless, and with her beautiful head bowed low in trembling fingers. At the thought of that I also bent my head and whispered, for the idea that she was praying seemed to me enough to make the universe prayerful.

Imperially the moon went down, inspiring the light clouds along the horizon with a radiance which, for the moment, rivalled her own, and then leaving them tarnished, blackening like corpses. The whole night of earth and air, notwithstanding the multitudinous stars, became at once sombre by comparison with the vanished splendor. A sympathetic

gloom oppressed me, and seemed to bid me prepare for some approaching peril. I had intended to go to bed when the moon should be down, but I felt less able to sleep now than ever, and so remained for an hour longer at the window, gazing moodily at the Sound, which darkened steadily as long columns of cloud advanced over the heavens. High in air there must have been wind to impel that vaporous army, but on earth not a breeze lifted its wings, and the hush, the stagnation, the suspense of nature was like omnipotence.

Suddenly through the holy silence crept a low sound which made my temples throb as if they echoed to it. A door at the back end of the upper hall opened so quietly, that, had it been day instead of night, or had the faintest wind stirred the garden leafage, I could not have heard it.

It is Somerville, I thought. Can he be going to run away?

I stole across the room, my steps muffled by the thick carpet, and knelt at the keyhole. The floor of the hall was covered with oil-cloth, but so cautious and steady was the walk of the person outside, that I did not distinguish a single footfall, and half concluded that he had not left his room. My pulse had beaten an hour into the space of a minute, when I heard the latch of the door opposite mine quietly lifted. Could it be that Miss Westervelt, unable to sleep, was coming out at that time of night, to join her sister, or to speak to her father? Or was it possible that Somerville had the wickedness to dare enter her chamber? If this last supposition were true, I could divine without a moment's reflection what was the cunning knave's object;—that he meant to be found there, to compromise her, and thus either force her to marry him, or gain a firmer hold than ever on the unhappy family. In another moment I distinguished a faint metallic sound, like the gliding of a key into a keyhole. I flung my door wide open and bounded into the hall. There, under my hand, was Somerville, half dressed, kneeling at the threshold of my little girl's room, and trying to pick the lock with some thievish implement.

He sprang up, but too late to defend himself. I levelled him with a blow, which to this day it does me good to think of, and then, throwing myself across him, attempted to hold him down and throttle him. He writhed from under me, however, and we both rose together.

“Who’s there?” I heard Mary call from within.

“Keep your door locked,” I replied. “Don’t let any one in.”

I had scarcely spoken when I caught a heavy blow on my forehead which staggered me against the wall. I struck back, blind and blundering as a beetle, but hit him by accident, and knocked him away from me during the moment necessary to recover my senses. Had it been daylight, I might have got soundly beaten, for Somerville was a fair boxer; but in that darkness, it was not easy to feint and parry, and weight proved an overmatch for science. In a moment or two I had laid hands on him and stretched him out on the floor, with a knee on each arm, and my fingers twisted in his neckcloth. He struggled and tried to lift me, but a little choking brought him to reason.

“Well, curse you! what do you want?” he gasped.

“Swear that you will go to your room and stay there all night,” said I.

After some farther writhing and muttering, he obeyed, and I let him rise. He stood motionless an instant, as if doubting what to do, but walked away without speaking when I told him to be off. A gentle tap on Mary’s door and a whisper of my name through the keyhole induced her to open it sufficiently to speak to me.

“Oh! what does this mean?” she asked, sobbing with fright.

“I have had an altercation with Mr. Somerville,” I replied, not choosing to increase her alarm by telling her the cause of the scuffle.

“With Mr. Somerville? Oh, Louis! has he hurt you?”

“Not at all, dear. I hurt *him*. Have you a bolt?”

“Yes.”

“Well, push the bolt and turn the key, and then go to sleep. There is no danger.”

I stood a few minutes in the hall, but heard no noises about the house, and concluded that the rest of the family had slept through the disturbance. Returning to my room I threw myself dressed on my bed, and perhaps slept, I can hardly say.





CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERY FORCED.

FULLY expected, on coming down next morning, to find that our Catiline had stolen away. It would waste two or three pages to attempt to express all the astonishment and indignation which I felt at seeing him enter the breakfast room as calm, unembarrassed, elegant, and fluent as usual. The impudence seems incredible; but he thought that he had us in his power.

He turned a little pale, indeed, as he took his seat at table and nodded to one after another; but not so pale by any means as those whom he thus braved and insulted. Even Mrs. Van Leer looked shy and frightened now, coloring scarlet as he came in and then whitening, with a painful consciousness of the rancorous, silent mystery which was taking shape before her, and perhaps with some pungent apprehensions on her own account. Mrs. Westervelt had up to this instant seemed utterly sick, broken and faint unto death, in soul and body; but Somerville's presence and a few words from him, though but of ordinary salutation, filled her with an excitement as of wine, painting a crimson spot in her white cheek and shaking her with starts, tremors, and unseemly laughter. The sleepless anguish of the past night had snapped her nerves and tided her on appreciably toward insanity. One moment her lips twitched and her blood-shot eyes brimmed with rebellious tears; and the next she burst

nto a convulsive giggle over some frivolous word or trifling accident. We scarcely touched the food, but swallowed our coffee eagerly, as if hoping some strength from it, and then pushed away from the table, following each other, a sullen chain-gang, into the library. Somerville alone sat out the usual time and ate with seeming appetite.

Mr. Westervelt took the family Bible in his lap, and said in a shaking voice, "We will have prayers." This was his custom, and these were his customary words, but uttered now as if he spoke them for the first time, and never before knew what it was to approach the eternal throne in utter feebleness and humiliation and anguish. I hoped that the human fiend who had destroyed our peace might feel some contrition, or at least shame, when he saw the Bible opened and the sorrowful, prayerful faces around it, and so would leave us to ourselves for that solemn moment, or perhaps be impelled to quit the house instantly and forever. But that was not in his policy, and he was unflinchingly himself to the end. He came in presently, and murmuring a word of regret at having detained us, took place in our circle with an air of genteel solemnity. Perhaps he did not look upon himself with horror; perhaps he did not see himself as others saw him; for sin throws strange enchantments around its votaries; it plays tricks on them like those of Ariosto's magicians; it makes them see men and things as they are not. It may be that Somerville thought it a fine jest or a clever feat thus to brave this wretched family and to profane its moments of most intimate sanctity; it may be that he hoped to face me down and to lie himself clear of the charges which had been brought against him; it may be that he was driven to this extremity of insolence by mere wrath and revenge.

Mr. Westervelt read only a few verses, and those in a tone so full of tremors that the words were hardly distinguishable. Somerville listened with an amazing command of muscle, eye and feature, never once changing position, nor lifting his gaze from the carpet, nor expressing aught in his face but

attentive seriousness. No stranger, looking in upon us, would have dared to say, even in his heart, 'One of you is a devil!' When we knelt, he also knelt, not ostentatiously, but quietly, and bending his wicked head like a true penitent. The prayer was as the prayer of a dying man, so humble and anxious and troubled was it, so formless and chaotic in expression, yet so passionately strong in emotion, so full of unuttered longings for pity and of grief that could not be spoken. When we rose and looked in each other's faces, there were tears in all eyes except mine and Somerville's. I was full of fury, and he was still a model of graceful composure. No one stirred; there was a moment of suspense, of expectation; every one seemed to know instinctively that now something all important to us was to be said or done; and Somerville awaited it like the others, watching principally me, through a self-possession which was like the iron bars of a visor.

"That will do, you scoundrel!" I said loudly and hoarsely, walking close up to him. "Now, off! Out of the house!"

It was not the best manner of dismissing even a black-guard; but I used blunt and coarse words because I could not call up keener ones.

Mrs. Westervelt fell back feebly on a lounge and covered her face with her hands, while the other ladies all stared at us, fascinated by that mixture of terror and interest which is excited in most women by the spectacle of masculine anger and conflict. Somerville had physical courage evidently, for his blood flowed outward instead of inward, flushing his face crimson. He drew a long strangling breath and turned coolly to Mr. Westervelt.

"Sir," said he, "can't you protect your family and your guests from this youngster's insolence?"

I was about to lay hands on him, but Mr. Westervelt checked me with an imploring gesture.

"I—I think, Mr. Somerville," stammered the frail, timid man, as white-faced now as any of the women;—"perhaps

you had better go. I really think you had. Yes, you ought to go," he continued, gathering energy as he saw Somerville glance imperiously at Mrs. Westervelt. "You must go; and—and you *shall* go, sir!"

Meanwhile the desperado glared at his victim as if commanding her to speak and reverse this decision. She would have obeyed him perhaps, but that words were beyond her power; her lips parted, as in a dream, and closed without other sound than such a gasp as comes from deathbeds.

"Will you go, sir?" demanded Mr. Westervelt more firmly. "I say, will you go? You shall not stay in this house another hour. I will not have it. I will not bear it any longer. I say, will you go?" he repeated, his voice rising until it was almost a scream. "You—you are a liar; you are a villain, sir! Be off!"

Somerville's calmness gave way all at once, and he burst into a paroxysm of fury, his form seeming to dilate like that of an enraged adder, and his two long teeth showing as if they were fangs filled with poison. A laugh came from him which sounded to me like that of a hyena exulting over a grave.

"I will not go," he thundered. "I will stay here as long as I choose; and what is more, I will make you glad to keep me. I hold you in my hand. I can destroy the honor of your family. Aha?"

"Do you mean to say anything against my daughters?" asked Mr. Westervelt, choking and shaking his feeble fist.

"Better than that!" retorted Somerville, his tusks visible all the while now, although he was not laughing. "You know very well what I mean. There is my victim."

He turned and pointed at Mrs. Westervelt, who gave a faint shriek and hid her head in the sofa cushions.

"Touch me, or drive me out of here, and I will gibbet your wife's reputation," he continued. "I have letters of hers that will damn her. Ask her if it is not so. Ask her! I will step out and leave you at liberty. If she does not tell

the truth, and nothing but the truth, I will show you her letters. So be frank, Madam," said he, facing her. "Aha! this troubles you, does it? You should have prevented it. I told you how. You should have prevented it."

Glaring around on us all, he bowed, stepped lightly into the hall, seized his hat and was gone, before we could open our lips to plead with him or curse him. In the veranda the Van Leer brothers passed him as they entered.

"What's the row, Somerville? What the devil's to pay?" they exclaimed, and, getting no answer, pushed on eagerly into the library.

I had started to follow the hyena, but Mr. Westervelt had called to me, "Don't strike him! don't provoke him! Consider us, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

Accordingly I halted on the steps, only shaking my fist and growling a menace.

"You are on the safe side, my lad," he replied with his hideous laugh. "I can't fight four men and four women. I shall not try to force your castle. But hearken to this. Before the day is out you will be writing me to come back,—bribing me to come back. I shall be at Rockford; you can direct to me there."

He walked on to the garden gate, opened it, looked back at me and added, "By the way, Fitz Hugh, I am out of money. When you come over for me, you had better bring a hundred dollars. That is all I shall want at present."

I presume that Somerville had intended to conduct this whole scene with better taste as well as better success, but his self-command had given way more easily and more completely than he expected, and the result was a ruffianism of manner and language, which, I dare say, the dandified brute afterward thought of with bland regret and vexation. To ordinary mortals, sober-minded and respectable people, such conduct as his seems like lunacy. So does murder, when you fully realize it, seem thus; and yet men have learned to take life almost without excitement. Somerville had perfectly habitu-

nted himself to his chosen path of wickedness, and he walked in it as a matter of course, only vaguely conscious that it was unnatural and infamous. There are few such creatures as he in the reputable classes of American society, but there are many in the disreputable. The New York police, at least, will understand me, when I say that he was simply a "fancy man," who had been tempted and enabled by circumstances to carry his robberies and brutalities into an unaccustomed circle. Doubtless it was to his gambling habits that he owed much of his wicked coolness, for no other human experience, not even battle, ices a man like the vicissitudes of the gambling-table.

Without answering his last bravado, I returned to the library, where all now was running and confusion, Mrs. Westervelt and Mrs. Van Leer having both fainted. As soon as the latter came fairly to her senses, she began to sob and whimper unappeasably, clinging close to her bewildered husband, after her usual fashion when in trouble. "Oh, that hateful, lying Somerville!" she gasped. "Oh, what a liar he is! Don't you believe a word he says, Henry. Don't let him say anything against me. He'll come and lie about me now. Don't listen to him, Henry."

"He sha'n't say a word against you. What can he say, though?" demanded the puzzled and excited man. "What is all this about? What the devil does it mean, Jule?"

"Oh, Henry! you scare me. Oh! you shan't speak to me so. Let's go away from here; come, let's go back to New York," she whined. "I'm afraid of that hateful Somerville. Oh! I'm afraid to stay here."

"Come, come, don't tremble so, Jule; keep a stiff upper lip, Jule," he replied soothingly. "But what is it all? What is the meaning of this infernal row?"

"Mr. Somerville has been slandering Mrs. Westervelt," I whispered, seeing that there was no way of quieting him except by an explanation. "He has slandered her and insulted the whole family."

Both Henry and Robert leaned eagerly toward me, their broad faces reddening as the sense of insult crept through their heavy intellects; and had Somerville been there then, it is likely that he would not have escaped without maltreatment that would have been next to murder. They had no time to speak, however, and scarcely time to comprehend what I said, before their wretched cousin opened her languid, anxious eyes upon us.

"Do you feel better, Ellen?" asked her husband tenderly, lifting her head and putting water to her lips. "Don't be frightened. That rascal is gone."

"Oh! is he?" she moaned hopelessly. "Oh, but he'll come back again. I know him. He'll be sure to come back. He'll tell you everything—worse than it is. I would rather tell it all myself."

"What! there is something then?" he exclaimed. "Oh! nothing wrong, Ellen? Oh, Ellen! you swore to me last night that there was nothing wrong."

"We had better step out," said I to the Van Leers, at the same time retreating toward the door.

With a decision which was so extraordinary in him, so out of character, that it seemed like a start of insanity, Mr. Westervelt immediately closed and locked the door. "No, no!" said he. "Stay here, all of you. I wish you to hear everything,—everything! This mystery is worse than the truth can possibly be."

Staring at the pale miserable woman on the sofa, we stood there, a silent, embarrassed group, only less disquieted and distressed than she.

"Oh! wait a minute," she said, crying. "Give me time to think. Oh! where shall I begin? I don't know what I'm about."

"What did you write to him in those letters?" asked her husband.

"Oh, yes—that was the beginning of it, I remember now. That was the way he first got me in his power,—by my let-

ters," she replied, talking straight on through her sobs and tears. "I really don't know why I ever came to write to him; I can't imagine how I could have been so imprudent; it has all been like a wild infatuation. But, stop; I do know very well what first made me write; it is strange that I should forget it. He was my lawyer, you know; and so we had to correspond. They were all business letters for a long time; but at last I wrote something, I hardly know what, which he said placed me in his power; and since then I never have been able to get free from him. Oh! don't leave me; don't turn away from me; you will kill me if you do. It is not what you think; no, not so bad as that; oh! do try to believe me. I have never, never, never forgotten that I loved my husband better than any one else in the world. You believe that, don't you, my dear?" And she clasped at his nerveless hands with a humble, piteous eagerness, and kissed them. "Do believe it, I beg of you, if you don't wish to kill me outright. Do you think that I could ever forget you, or our little boy? Oh, never, never! But I have been so very wretched; oh! so very helpless and frightened almost all the while for the last four or five years. This man has persecuted me continually, and followed me everywhere, threatening and tormenting me so that I have wished a great many times that I could die. I am sure that he ought to be punished, either in this world or some other, for hunting down the very life of a poor weak woman, never giving her an hour of peace, always threatening and abusing her, although she never did him any harm. And it was all to extort money from me. Oh! I hate him, I loathe him, and I have hated him for years, although he made me treat him so politely, and made me invite him here as if he was one of my best friends. I cannot be happy as long as I think that I shall ever see his face again. Oh! I can never be happy any more."

She pressed her hands against her eyes, and laid her head back against the wall, sobbing as if her bosom would burst with its heavings.

"Is that the way your watches and laces and money went, Ellen? Did Somerville take them?" asked Henry Van Leer.

"Yes, he took them. He took my laces in New York. Then he took my watch and more laces about the time Mr. Fitz Hugh came here. After that he took the emerald which I gave to Genevieve, but lost it, and Johnny Treat found it. My miniature,—he stole that, and sold the setting. He has taken a great many other things, before and since; and I never dared resist him, but only to beg for some of them. I have had to give him money too,—a great deal of it. He would have it, and made me sell my trinkets and clothes and sometimes bank-stocks to get it for him."

How could we believe all this, and yet not believe that she was terribly culpable? How could an innocent wife, such as she asserted herself to be, come so completely under the power of a man who was not her relative, whose mere society was danger and whose intimacy was pollution? Judging her by her own story, it seemed certain that she must have fallen from the heaven of woman's purity. This woful conclusion was present, I believe, to all of us, and sunk deeper momentarily into our minds, in spite of sorrow and sympathy and love for this unfortunate one, in spite of pity for ourselves. It did not, however, nerve any person to speak an angry or accusing word, except Henry Van Leer. To his narrow, fleshly, matter-of-fact nature the hard inference was a hard truth, undisguised, unrelieved by any of that delicate drapery of doubt and pity, which a more tender, imaginative mind would have thrown around it. He was the near blood-relative of Mrs. Westervelt, also; and thus naturally felt her guilt as an insult to himself. Advancing close to his miserable cousin, he laid one of his heavy hands on her and pushed her head back so as to look in her face, saying hoarsely, "Tell us the whole truth, Ellen. You have done something. What is it? Don't go on lying to us. By Heavens! you shall let us know the whole truth."

"Oh, Henry!—Henry! have pity on me," she gasped, shrinking away from his stern face. "Oh! I can't,—I can't tell you."

"You shall! you shall!" he shouted. "Do you think we have no right to know? We have a right, I tell you; and you shall confess the whole, by Heavens! No more lies, Ellen! You have lied to us enough about the lace and jewels and those things."

Mr. Westervelt tried to speak, in defence of his wife, I believe; but the words died on his white lips, and he turned away, groaning.

"Henry, have mercy on me!" she sobbed again. "I cannot speak it—not before you all—but I will tell you—I will tell it in writing—only give me time to think."

"Time to think a lie!" responded Van Leer furiously.

"No, no," she said. "I will let you know the whole truth. I promise—I promise before God, that you shall know everything—only give me an hour to try and remember."

"That is enough, Ellen," said Mr. Westervelt, putting out one trembling hand as if to protect her. "You shall have till to-morrow to think it all over. Be quiet, Mr. Van Leer. This affair concerns me more nearly than any one else."

He stepped to the door, unlocked it and walked unsteadily into the garden. We followed him as far as the hall and then separated, each one taking a different way, as if we felt it impossible to exchange a word or even to endure each other's presence. Henry Van Leer halted to mutter something in the ear of Mrs. Westervelt. I could not hear it, but it must have been cruel, for she turned upon him like a creature driven to desperation, and made this bitter retort, "You had better look after your own wife; I am not the only woman who has been intimate with Mr. Somerville."

"Liar! what do you mean?" he exclaimed, quite beside himself with fury; but she rushed off without answering, took refuge in her room and locked herself in.

"Ellen! Ellen!" he shouted, following her close and beating violently on the door.

No answer, except a silence which streamed into his present mood like a breath of poison; and after raving under it a minute, he went out to pace the veranda with slow step and scowling brow. I presume that he had never before coupled the two facts, first that Somerville was a dissolute man, and second that he had been much with Mrs. Van Leer; but now they presented themselves in cruel brotherhood, inextricable to his mind, armed with sharp suspicions which severed rapidly all the tendrils of faith which had hitherto bound him to his wife. If one of these women has fallen, he doubtless said to himself, how can I be sure of the other? I believe that dull-minded, coarse-natured people are rarely convinced by halves, or take up a new emotion cautiously. Run your eye through the life of the less intelligent classes, and you will be struck by the superior energy of their prejudices, the extravagance of their likes and dislikes, the lack of self-command in their expression of feeling. Van Leer was a gentleman in position and dress, but a clodhopper in mental and moral culture. When, five minutes after Mrs. Westervelt had quitted him, he walked into the parlor and stood face to face with me, he was savagely jealous of that wife whom hitherto he had adored and trusted so unreservedly.

"Fitz Hugh," said he, "what do you know about my wife and Somerville?"

"Your wife and Somerville!" I returned, affecting to misunderstand;—"you mean your cousin and Somerville."

"I mean my wife," he repeated loudly. "Have you seen her flirting with that — scoundrel? Tell me that. Tell me, for God's sake, Fitz Hugh, and put me out of my misery."

"You are crazy, my dear friend," I replied, with that charity which any man's heart would have dictated. "What *could* I see? I have seen nothing but what has passed under your own eyes and in presence of the family."

At that moment the butterfly came fluttering around the flame that was ready to scorch her. Mrs. Van Leer appeared in the doorway, glanced suspiciously at me, half turned away, stole a side look at her husband, and finally walked up to him with a forced smile which was truly piteous. As he watched her timorous movements, his large, brown eyes dilated, and he seemed to kindle within to a mass of throbbing passion.

"Look here!" said he. "I have heard about your trifling with that blackguard. What does it mean? What have you been doing? Ha?"

She flinched before him, as well she might, and really looked like a most guilty creature. He extended his solid right hand and laid it on her yielding shoulder, crushing his fingers deep into the gauzy boddice, while he never removed his eyes from hers. She trembled from head to foot, and seemed to be upheld only by his grasp.

"Oh Henry! don't believe it," she begged, when he shook her to make her speak. "I wouldn't—I wouldn't do wrong. Oh! believe *me*. Don't believe *him*."

"Him? Fitz Hugh hasn't said anything against you. What have you got to say for yourself? Come along."

Seizing her by the arm, he dragged her off as if she had been a child.

"Oh! don't, Henry. I didn't do anything. I wish I never had seen Mr. Somerville. I wish I never had got married. Oh! I wish I was dead," were the last whimpers that I heard as he hurried her away.

How ill the poor frivolous flirt bore the natural results of her coquetry! It was laughable, although I did not laugh, to compare her pitiable fright with the gay boasts which she had often made, as to how she would put her husband down if he should ever dare to be jealous. For every flirtation that he charged her with, she would acknowledge two, she said, and thus make herself out so horribly guilty, that, for the sake of his own peace of mind, he would drop the subject

like a hornet's nest. Well, at last the hour of trial had come; and she would have given her entire wardrobe to have it over.

Not knowing precisely how far Van Leer's blind jealousy might carry him, I should have been anxious about the silly woman, had I not soon heard her open her door and call, in a voice of weeping desperation, to Mary Westervelt. My little girl's dress rustled hastily along the hall; and I whispered to myself, "Blessed are the peacemakers!"

When Mrs. Van Leer came down stairs again, she had been forgiven, although she was still a wonderfully anxious, meek, and shamefaced creature. How had pertness departed from her lips, and coquetry from her eyes, and brass from her forehead! She was no rarity; we meet just such people everywhere; heroic as Don Quixote, in galloping into difficulties; unwarlike and helpless as Sancho Panza, when the shock comes; perfect ideals in their own conceit of tact, readiness, and administrative talent; but blown away like foam by the passion-breath of a truly strong nature, whether physical or moral. I do not suppose that they are downright liars, when they boast of what they will and can do, but rather that they are deceived by the vivacity of their animal spirits or the warmth of their imaginations. Vanity, too, is an incessant cajoler, who can make the deafest hear, and the most skeptical believe. How often have the cleverest of us been persuaded by her that we had really beaten our ploughshares into swords, and our pruning-hooks into spears, only to find, when the battle commenced, that they were still but ploughshares and pruning-hooks, and that there was nothing for us to do but to run for it!

Weeks after this unhappy day I discovered that Mrs. Van Leer, with the usual meanness of a moral coward, had endeavored to drag in the name of Mrs. Westervelt between herself and her husband's anger. Necessarily our own peccadilloes look like molehills when we can exaggerate the sins of our neighbors to mountains. Mrs. Westervelt and Mr.

Somerville ought to be ashamed of themselves, she said. Oh! it was a dreadful, dreadful affair to be sure, and they both ought to be punished most severely; and the worst of all was, how innocent they had seemed all the while, so as to deceive the very elect of virtue. How could his poor little wife know that Somerville was a bad man, when that woman there, who pretended to be so knowing, and so good too, was intimate with him? Oh! they had both been too deep for everybody; and she, his unhappy Jule, had been taken in like all the rest; and now her husband was angry with her because she was not cleverer than he was. He had better settle with the guilty ones first, before he turned upon her, who was just as much astonished and horror-struck by the exposure as anybody. She wished he had never brought her to Seacliff to stay with his relatives. She wished he had never introduced that hateful Somerville to her. She wished she was dead and safe in her grave.

An hour or two of this whining and coaxing brought Van Leer around so completely that he came out of the room furious at his cousin for maligning his wife, as well as for her other supposed iniquities. He laid wait for the unhappy woman, and discovered her stealing into the library in search of writing materials.

"Ellen!" he called in a brutal tone, "I've just one piece of advice to give you. Make away with yourself and done with it."

The savage remark may have struck, not only on the woe in her heart, but on some terrible purpose that was blindly forming there, for she turned from him with a shriek and rushed back to her room.

Who can tell of the agony that was enacted in that chamber? What bloody sweat came from that poor soul in her hopeless Gethsemane, suffering selfishly, thanklessly, for her own sins, and not generously, supportably, for the sins of others! Two or three times she called Willie in there and held him in her lap, crying; but the child soon begged his

way out, dismayed by a grief so violent. On the rest of us she kept the door locked all that day and the night following. Whoever spoke to her, she would make no reply, except to beg in a low voice, which sounded strangely unearthly through the pannels, that she might be left alone a little longer. All this time, of course, I did not once see her; but I continually imagined her sitting at her table and bending over her dreary task of confession; now covering her face and trying to strangle her sobs with her trembling hands; then again dipping the cruel pen into her heart and writing on. Hours when all was innocence and happiness; hours when temptation had come, but resistance was still possible; one fatal hour in which the sin was stricken deep into her soul like a barbed arrow; then amazement, shame, terror, remorse, and all the first convulsive agony of crime; then a weary wandering from sorrow to sorrow, driven on by a demon in human form; all must be called up, must be endured anew, must be told, if that were possible. Do you remember the gloom and dismay which you felt the first time it happened to you, then a little child, perhaps, to pass a day in a house where laid the corpse of some one whom you well knew? It was with nearly the same feeling that I thought of that room and of the living death which was within it.

What a sullen and cheerless night it seemed to us, notwithstanding the gay chirp of the crickets, the tender whisper of the south wind, the great shimmer of the Sound, and the lofty resurrection of the host of Heaven! Yet I believe that all of us slept somewhat, for we were quite worn out by twenty-four hours of fearful excitement; and slumber will come to utter weariness, even though pain watches with it and death stands knocking at the door.



CHAPTER XXX.

CONFESSION.

SLEEP came to me so late that, as a consequence, it left me late, or at least later than I expected. It was nearly seven o'clock, when, going down stairs, I found Mr. and Mrs. Van Leer, Mary, and Genevieve in the parlor, all silent, and gazing abstractedly out of different windows, as I have seen crazy people in lunatic asylums. I had just inquired for Mr. Westervelt, and learned that he had not yet been seen, when he walked slowly into the room. Unaware of us, his head bent, his hands unconsciously crumpling a manuscript. When I spoke to him he looked up with a start, and mumbled something which was doubtless meant for Good-morning. Presently he drew the roll of paper from behind him, shook his head sadly, sank into a chair, put on his spectacles, and began to peruse the serawled, blotted pages with a sickening look of trouble.

"It is very bad," he said at last, shaking his head again; "very bad indeed; but not so bad as it might have been; not so bad as some of us thought. Mary, has any one seen Mrs. Westervelt?"

"I believe not, papa," she replied; and all of us repeated "No," in succession.

"I have knocked at her door, but she did not answer," said he. "I suppose she is asleep,—worn out,—poor child!"

It was touching to hear the tone of kindness, unaffected, and, as it were, unconscious, with which he spoke of her.

"Well," he resumed, after another glance at the manuscript, "here is the whole story. It is a very bad one, but not the worst,—thank Heaven, not the worst! I will read it to you. You must all hear it."

Mary quietly locked the doors, and we sat down around him.

"My dear husband," he began, but his voice faltered weakly among the words, and sank helpless; soundless over the last, the tenderest. He sought to recall his manhood; he made an unavailing struggle with his heart, that was painful to behold; and then, with a look at us which said, You see that I cannot do it, he mutely handed me the paper. I took the tear-stained, blurred, almost illegible pages, and read aloud this sorrowful tale of weakness, crime, and retribution.

"MY DEAR HUSBAND:—

"I wish you in the first place to believe that I love you from the bottom of my heart, and that never, never since our marriage have I been unfaithful to you in deed or thought. I declare this to you most solemnly, as if with my dying breath; and I will repeat it to you at the last great day; and God knows that it is the truth. Do not, I beg of you, believe one word that Mr. Somerville may say against my honor as a wife. I have sins enough to answer for, but not that one.

"To make you forgive me, or at least pity me a little, I will tell you how I came under this wicked man's influence. I committed a great crime, indeed, but not such a crime as you suspect. You remember that my old uncle, Jacob C Van Leer, supported me from the time my parents died, introduced me into society, dressed me handsomely, gave parties for me, and took me to all the watering-places. While he lived, I was quite a belle, very gay and very fashionable. Alas! it was this which ruined me. If I had not loved dress, or, if I had not been so ambitious to move in the first society

I might have been a happy woman now, instead of a most wretched one.

“Everybody said, and I always supposed, that, as my uncle had no children, and I had no parents, he would leave all his money to me, who had lived with him so long, and been, as it were, his daughter. He had no other natural heir, except my cousins, Henry and Robert, and he knew that they were very rich already. But at last I learned that he was anxious to keep his property in the name, and meant to give it all to my cousins, only leaving me the interest of ten thousand dollars until I should get married. It was Mr. Somerville himself who told me that such a will had been made. Mr. Somerville came to know about it, because he was the junior partner of Mr. Longbill, my uncle’s lawyer, and helped to draught the papers. He was a very fashionable, showy man then, as he is now, and pretended to be a great friend of mine. His friendship began during my first season at Saratoga, when he was excessively struck by my waltzing. You remember, my dear husband, how fond I was of waltzing when you first knew me. Oh, me! I shall never waltz any more. But I was speaking of Mr. Somerville, and of what he told me about the will. It made me very melancholy and perhaps angry. I knew that I could not move suitably in society on six or seven hundred a year. It seemed very cruel of my uncle thus to blight my prospects, especially after he had led me to entertain such expectations. If my cousins had needed it, I would not have cared so much about it; but it was too bad to cut me off so, merely to keep the money in the name of Van Leer.”

“Why, she’s crazy,” broke in Henry. “She wasn’t cut off; nothing of the sort. What in Heaven’s name does she mean?”

Mr. Westervelt turned a vacant eye on him and then pointed to me. I continued from the manuscript.

“Mr. Somerville often told me so, in a manner that seemed very friendly then, although I am sure now that it was for

no good. Oh! he has always been too deep for me, and too wicked. He was quite frequent in his calls about this time, and repeatedly made me presents of bouquets, and I occasionally wondered if he had any serious intentions. But he said nothing very remarkable until a little while after Mr. Longbill died. Then he told me that now he was the manager of my uncle's estate, and that there was nothing in the world to prevent me from having the will altered. I told him that I was ashamed to speak to my uncle about it. He laughed at me, said that I was very innocent, and talked a long time in a strange, joking way before I could understand him. At last I saw that what he meant was to have a will forged which should give me all the property. Oh, my dear husband, I want that you should do me justice, and believe that at first I was horror-struck at this dishonest and wicked proposition. I told Mr. Somerville that I would not think of it for a minute. But, oh! I did think of it night and day; so troubled by it, that sometimes I could hardly eat or sleep; so tempted that I could not get rid of the idea even in my pleasantest parties. At last, when Mr. Somerville urged the plan for perhaps the twentieth time, I half consented."

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Henry Van Leer. "I begin to understand. The will was a false one, eh? I say, Robert, —well, never mind;—I'll tell you another time. Go on, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

"Yes, go on," said Robert, excitedly. "You dry up, Henry. What's the use interrupting so!"

"Oh, my husband!" the manuscript continued, "do not, I beg of you, tell my cousins how much I have wronged them, unless you must. I am obliged to tell you, but they need never hear of it, surely; and then, you know, they do not want the money. It was wrong to cheat them out of it, but they did not feel the loss of it."

"It must all go back." spoke out Mary, in such a firm, imperative voice as I had never before heard from her. "Indeed, we cannot keep it."

“Not a bit of it!” cried Robert, furiously. “I won’t touch the first red.”

“Please go on,” said Mr. Westervelt, languidly, and I continued.

“Well, when I had consented, Mr. Somerville brought me a false will, all complete, with a signature like my uncle’s and several others of witnesses. Nothing was left out but the date, which he said must not be added till my uncle died. Whether he wrote the paper himself or hired some other person to do it, I do not know, for he never told me, and he could imitate every sort of handwriting. The will gave me all my uncle’s property, except a thousand dollars a-piece to my cousins.” (“That’s so,” muttered Henry.) “Mr. Somerville showed it to me once, and then I did not see it again for more than a year; that is, not till my uncle was dying. Then he brought me the real will (though I don’t know how he got hold of it) and the false one with it, and made me read them over. I pretended to do it, but I hardly saw one word that was in them, I was crying so at the thought of my poor old uncle and of my own wickedness.

“‘Now,’ said he, when I handed them back to him, ‘burn the one that you dislike.’

“‘Give me the false one, then,’ said I. ‘I can’t burn the other. I won’t do it. It is too wicked.’

“He tossed me one of them, and I threw it into the grate without looking at it.

“‘There,’ said he; ‘there goes the true will; it was the true will I gave you.’

“I jumped to save it, but it was already half burned. Then I threatened to run up stairs and confess the whole to my uncle; but it seemed too late, he was so near death; and, finally, I dared not do it. While I was still wringing my hands and walking about the room in a fright, Mr. Somerville demanded my signature to a paper promising to pay him ten thousand dollars when I came into possession of my uncle’s property. I signed it, because he threatened to ex-

pose me if I did not, and because I was in such a perplexity that I did not know what to do. The moment he had my name, he took both the papers and hurried off. I suppose that he went to put the false will in place of the old one before any one should discover its absence; but I do not know, for he never told me anything about it, and I cannot even guess how he got at my uncle's private papers. Perhaps it was half an hour afterward, though it seemed a whole day, that a servant came to tell me that uncle was suddenly worse, and would only live a few minutes. I ran up to the room crying, and fainted away by the bedside. Oh, my husband! I was really very much to be pitied, notwithstanding that I was such a guilty tool of a wicked man."

"Poor Nelly!" Henry Van Leer muttered, perhaps un-awares to himself.

"Why, good Lord! we would have given her the money," exclaimed Robert. "Good Lord! we wouldn't have taken the first dollar from her."

"Please to continue," said Mr. Westervelt; again, without seeming to notice the Van Leers.

"And now, my dear husband," I read on, "you understand the whole. Now you can see how I came under the influence of Mr. Somerville, and never could break away from him, no, not even when you commanded me to do so. Much as I have loved you,—and I *have* loved you dearly,—I dared quarrel with you sooner than with him. Oh! that man has been the terror and anguish of my life. I have feared him day and night, present and absent. I have hated him, too, as I never thought I could hate any of my fellow-creatures. He made me wicked, and he has kept me wicked. How often when I was the belle of the evening, when I was laughing and dancing as though I was too gay to think, have I envied the homeliest and most unnoticed woman present, if I saw a look of pure, sinless happiness in her face! How willingly and joyfully would I have given up my ill-gotten wealth, if I could have regained my old innocence! But, you see, it

could not be. If I resigned it to my cousins, I must tell how I came by it. So I had to keep my money, and it was a perpetual torment.

“ I paid Mr. Somerville his ten thousand dollars. What he did was worth that, if I had really cared to have him do it. But that was only the beginning of his extortions. He spent his money on bad women, or gambled it away, in a few months, and then he demanded more, threatening to show me up if I refused. I thought that he was as guilty as I, but I knew that he was far more reckless, and I did not dare to make him desperate. Although I was worth fifty thousand dollars, I had to economize closely, in order to meet the checks he drew on me. He spent nearly all my income one year, and made me use part of my capital for my own support. At last, my dear husband, you addressed me, and I accepted you. I hoped that your position and character would be a defence to me, and keep off this villain, who so tortured and robbed me. But he was too cunning and too desperate to be beaten. During all our engagement, yes, and during all our married life, in America and in Europe, he has haunted, plagued, terrified, and plundered me. I have wondered a thousand times that you never saw into our miserable secret. How could you help seeing that I hated this man, and yet dreaded him so that I did not dare to say that I hated him !”

Mr. Westervelt interrupted the reading with a groan, but made no remark. The Van Leers muttered half audible maledictions.

“ Let me tell you some particular things that he has done,” the narrative went on. “ You will hardly believe that a man, who is so polite and graceful as he is in society, can be guilty of such ungentlemanliness and cruelty to a woman ; but, so sure as I live, and God lives, all that I am going to tell you is the sacredest truth. He has often pretended to be in love with me, and has made me such proposals that I am ashamed to tell them, and would only stop urging the subject when I would give him money. Then, if I had nothing for him, he

would rob me to my face. Once he took my watch, although I begged and cried to have him spare it, because it was left me by my mother when I was a little girl. After that he often carried off my jewelry and laces, sometimes before my eyes and sometimes secretly. He frequently threatened to be the death of me, swore at me, and called me the vilest names, all to make me furnish him money."

Mr. Westervelt groaned again here, while the Van Leers cursed loudly and furiously.

"At last, he began to strike me; yes, as true as God lives, to strike me."

"Is the man a beast?" roared Henry Van Leer. "I swear, I'll kill him. Bat, go on. Let's hear. Let's hear the whole of it. I'll finish him;—I'll——"

"It was just before we went to Europe, that he first struck me," I read. "I had not seen him for a long while, except by accident at a party, and then only to say Good-evening. Sometimes he would leave me alone in this way, when he got plenty of money from other sources; and then I would get heart again, go into society, and try to be happy, as I was before. You must remember, my dear husband, how I used to differ in this respect at different times. You must remember how cheerful and sociable I became during that whole year when he was absent in Europe, just before our own tour. Did you ever see me lively and happy when he was about? Now you know the reason.

"Well, when he returned, I was anxious to be away, and teased you into going abroad. I tried to keep the affair a secret, but he heard of it. While we were staying at the Millionaire Hotel, in New York, he saw me in the passage, followed me into my room, told me to hush my noise when I offered to call the servants, and demanded money. As I said that I had none, he put his hand in my dress pocket, and then rummaged my drawers until he found my porte-monnaie and three bracelets. The bracelets were valuable,—one a diamond,—and the porte-monnaie contained about fifty dollars.

Then he presented a draft for five hundred dollars, and told me to sign it. I refused. He locked the door, and began to curse me. I still refused, and tried to get at the bell. He struck my hands three or four times, and finally struck me in the face. I screamed, but no one heard me, and he struck me again, and pulled my hair, until I promised to be still. At last he said he would go away if I would sign a draft for two hundred and fifty dollars. You will not wonder that I did so."

I need not repeat the running comments of the Van Leers; they were frequent and profane at this stage of the story.

"Father, ought we to hear all this?" asked Mary.

"Stay," said he. "You must hear it all. It will be a lesson to you. Oh, what a lesson!"

"You know how soon he followed us to Europe," the confession went on. "You know how he stuck by us at Paris, and again at Florence, until I persuaded you away from both those beautiful places before we had half seen them. You could not imagine then why I was so unreasonable and obstinate. In Europe, he repeatedly robbed me; repeatedly threatened and cursed and struck me. I used to make the girls wear my best laces, and keep my jewelry in their trunks, so that he could not possibly get at them. Finally, he threatened so violently that he would ruin me, and send me to Sing Sing, that I sold nearly half my ornaments, and gave him the money, which was about fifteen hundred francs. At Florence, when I met him at the Grand Ducal ball, he tried to make me give him a draft on my bankers, at home, for two thousand dollars, promising to let me entirely alone in future, if I would do so. When I refused, he said that I should learn his vengeance as soon as I got to America. That was the last time I saw him in Europe.

"In a fortnight after we reached home he reappeared, and robbed me of my Neapolitan corals. They were not marked;—I never had my name on things now;—I was afraid he would pledge them, and then a name would have discov-

ered all. It was a constant wonder to me that you never found out how my valuables disappeared, and why I wore so little lace and jewelry, when before I wore such a quantity. Oh, I have had to tell you so many falsehoods! I do most humbly and earnestly ask your pardon for them. You see how wretchedly I was forced to lie.

"It was after we returned from Europe that Mr. Somerville began to put advertisements in the secret column of the *New York Tattler*. He addressed me by the name of Josephine, and signed himself Rudolph. Sometimes he demanded money in this way, sometimes threatened me with exposure, and sometimes ordered me to meet him in this or that part of the city, which was often a very low quarter. Perhaps these advertisements were the revenge that he spoke of in Florence. At all events, they used to frighten me dreadfully, they seemed so public, and so easily understood. Yet I subscribed for the *Tattler*, and always felt wretchedly when it failed, for fear that I should miss seeing his advertisements, and so he would get furious, and expose me.

"I soon found that I could not enjoy myself in New York society, because he was always there, and always ready to torment me. That was the reason that I bought this Sealiff house, and chose to live in the country, when, as you know, I hate country life. But he followed us up here as soon as summer came, and recommenced his old persecutions, becoming more and more violent as I grew poorer and less able to satisfy him. I think that he has robbed me, all together, of about ten thousand dollars, besides the first sum that I gave him. All this I had to conceal, as well as I could, by silence and lying. Then no sooner had I covered up one loss in a manner, than he would come for more money, and I would have to find it or endure everything.

"There is one thing that I want Mary should know. A little while ago he told me that he really believed I was running low, and that he was going to look elsewhere for money. He said that he should marry one of the girls, because he

felt sure that, if he was once connected with the family, he could attack Westervelt, senior, to advantage, and get at least a hundred thousand dollars out of him. He said that he should choose Mary, and that I must help him by influencing her in his favor, and by saying things against Mr. Fitz Hugh, who was the only person that he feared as a rival. I begged that he would not do it; for I loved Mary too well to wish her married to such a bad, cruel man; but he insisted so, and threatened me so, that at last I promised to do just as he ordered. I never did, however; on the contrary, I said what I could to prejudice Mary against him; yes, my husband, I even risked discovery to keep her out of his power. I want you to tell Mary this, so that she may not hate and despise me utterly.

“ I have lost very little jewelry, this summer, because I had little to lose. My Geneva watch, my Paris bracelet, my miniature, and some laces, are all that he has got from me. He took an emerald which I had given to Jenny, but lost it, and Johnny Treat brought it back. The girls will see now why I have been so free of my ornaments. But I have been obliged to give him about four hundred and fifty dollars since last June, and I have suffered such treatment as has almost driven me crazy. Oh, my husband, how is it possible that you could not see how miserable I was, and why I was so miserable! But you have been away a great deal, and when you were at home you were full of your business. A great many times I have been on the point of telling you everything, but I dared not, and how could I dare? Twice I have bought poison, and sat looking at it for hours, trying to get courage to take it, and then have thrown it away, with a scream, because I came so near doing it. Very often, too, I have taken the dagger which you bought at Naples, when you thought of travelling in Sicily, and held it to my heart till I felt as if I should have fainted.

“ Pity me, my dear husband, and try to forgive me. That is all I ask, and more than I deserve. I am not worthy of

your affection, not worthy of having been your wife, not worthy of being the mother of our dear little boy. But oh, in the name of Heaven, pity me and do not curse me. It will be hard for you, perhaps." ("No, not hard," murmured Mr. Westervelt.) "I make you very unhappy; almost as unhappy as I am. But you have a kind heart. You will see me once more before I die, will you not? After that I will ask you for nothing farther.

"I have told you all now that you need know. I have confessed all my guilt. There is nothing else to tell;—I swear it as before my God.

"Your unhappy wife,

"ELLEN WESTERVELT."

Mr. Westervelt did not look up when I ended. He sat still, his chin on his bosom, his eyes on the floor, his hands folded, an image of quiescent, helpless suffering. Mary rose up, the firmest and bravest of the two sisters, notwithstanding her inborn gentleness, and, putting her arm around Genevieve's waist, led her out of the room. Mrs. Van Leer followed, sufficiently pale and cast down for decency, but not by any means the cheerless creature that she had been at this time the day before, and perhaps disposed to thank God on the whole that she was not as other women. It is a matter of much satisfaction and gratitude with me to observe how heroically most of us endure the misfortunes of other people. What would become of the human race if we really loved our neighbors as ourselves? It would die of a broken heart before next Christmas. Heaven be praised for that great conservative quality, that salvatory instinct, that beneficent though unbeautiful virtue, so absurdly abused by well-meaning but short-sighted theologians and philanthropists, the Charity that begins at home! I will not attempt to deny, however, that Mrs. Van Leer may have been somewhat over-zealous, and, as it were, superstitious in her devotion to this particular grace.

"Mr. Westervelt, now don't say a word about that money," blurted Robert. "Don't you offer it, sir. I shan't touch it."

"Nor I, either," added his brother. "Not a dollar."

"But that's very little," resumed Robert. "That's a small affair. As to the—the—well, the shame of it, I don't know what to say. It's a hard case for you, Mr. Westervelt. It's a hard case for us, too. She's our cousin as well as your wife. We must bear and help bear."

"Yes," said Henry; "That's very true, Bob. Mr. Westervelt and we must stand by each other."

"Gentlemen, I thank you for your kindness," replied Mr. Westervelt, seeming to start all at once into a consciousness of the conversation. "But I cannot keep this property. It is all yours. I shall repay you, as soon as I can, the portion that has been squandered and the interest. As to my shame, I will endure that as well as God will help me to do."

It is astonishing how little the lachrymal glands are used by men of the Anglo-Saxon breed. Masculine weeping seems to have been quite respectable in classic days; Socrates was considered little better than a fool for not crying before his judges; Cicero had no hesitation about wetting the manly toga and the senatorial rostrum with pathetic gushings; and, generally, the heroes and sages of those times were what we should call a womanish lot in this particular of whimpering. As for the moderns of other races than ours, they blubber copiously without distinction of sex. I shall never forget my astonishment when I first saw a moustached Frenchman, who doubtless would not have hesitated, at the command of honor, to fight a duel or charge a battery, burst into public tears in broad noon-day. But here was this timid, sensitive, fragile man, no hero, the farthest from it possible, sitting dry-eyed in his dungeon of sorrows, and merely showing a few nervous twitches of the mouth and hands as Giant Despair turned the invisible thumb-screws. I had seen him weep, indeed, but it was with me alone, once only, and then no more.

To all the generous urgencies and expostulations of the

Van Leers on the property question, he returned no answer but a monotonous shaking of the head, and at last begged them, with some little peevishness, to drop the subject.

"Well, sir, wait a while, then, and think of it," observed Henry. "But we must finish this Somerville, Bob," he added, clenching his weighty fist.

"Yes, we must," returned Robert. "I'll try that. I can devote my life to that. I've nothing else to do; nothing else particular to live for."

Mr. Westervelt left the library silently; and after waiting a moment to let him escape us if he wished, we followed his example. He went with slow, trembling steps to his wife's room, and called softly "Ellen!" The key turned, the door opened a little way, there was a sound as of some one kneeling, a sobbing whisper, and he entered. What words passed in that chamber during the next half hour I partially know, but may not repeat, because they are set apart, and, as it were, sanctified by grief and forgiveness,—grief the most un-comforted and forgiveness the most tender.

The Van Leers were now for driving over to Rockford and breaking Somerville's bones without farther delay; but to this attractive plan of action I objected for fear that it might result in unveiling the mystery. Much as Somerville deserved to writhe under some severe and immediate punishment, it seemed best to defer that pressing justice, rather than make the Westervelts the butt of a county's scandal in the very moment that their calamity had fallen upon them. It cost much reasoning and persuasion to wheedle the brothers from a vengeance so congenial to their muscular natures; but at last they agreed to leave the villain for that day in peace,—the peace, we hoped, of uncertain terrors and remorse,—the peace of demons and the lost.

During the remainder of the day Mrs. Westervelt kept herself secluded, allowing no one to enter her room but her husband and Willie. Toward evening Mr. Westervelt came to me with a disturbed look, in which I thought I saw the workings of some new trouble.

"I am afraid that my wife—I am afraid that she is losing her mind," he whispered. "She talks very strangely this afternoon. I happened to allude to that dreadful paper again. She denied that she had made any confession; denied that she knew a person by the name of Somerville; said it was a very odd name, and burst out laughing at it. What do you think of that, Mr. Fitz Hugh? Very singular,—very abnormal,—isn't it? I wish you could see her, but she won't allow it."

"A physician," I suggested. "Send to Rockford immediately."

"I would—I would," he began, and hesitated. "But, you know—she might say something—might rave about the truth. Well, never mind; they would call it raving; would think nothing of it. I will send instantly."

He sent; the doctor came; pronounced her sane. Mr. Westervelt shook his head sadly, and whispered to me that it was only a lucid moment. He watched her constantly, and would not suffer Willie to be alone with her, although she entreated it with tears, saying that now he was the only creature in the world who did not despise and hate her. It was eight o'clock in the evening when the doctor went away. The day had passed in a sort of stupor, without action and without resolve; we had done nothing with Somerville, nor had we decided what to do with him, nor what to do with Mrs. Westervelt, nor what to do with ourselves. In the mean time destiny was shaping such an end of all, such a punishment for the guilty man, such a rest for the wretched woman, as we could not have fashioned short of crime.

During the evening, Mr. Westervelt became more firmly convinced that his wife's mind had given way. A portion of her conversation, which he repeated to me, was the veryrodomontade and perplexity of madness. Does it seem strange to any one, does it seem incredible that she should now break down suddenly under her guilty conscience, when she had borne it for years so steadily and without any visible

signs of great anguish? That pitiless analyst of humanity, Thackeray, observes, in effect at least, that discovery is the fang which oftenest introduces the poison, remorse. The satire is pointed, and barbed also, cutting deep and sticking fast in the sore of ignoble cowardice which in one form or another so commonly infects our moral nature; and although there may be many sincere souls who need no other torment than their own sharp consciences, yet do I fear that the most of us can sleep with a certain miserable calmness in sin, until a strength from without stings us. Besides, consider how weakened the mind must become by long struggle to hide guilt; day by day, insensibly, it fails and grows toward decay; at last the shock of discovery crushes it at a blow.

When we retired late in the evening, Mr. Westervelt noiselessly locked his wife into her room, and then lay down in front of her door on a mattress brought for the purpose. I threw myself dressed on a sofa in the parlor, while Robert took the chamber lately occupied by Somerville, and the rest went to their usual sleeping places; all of us leaving our doors open, so that we might hear and be quickly at hand in case the lunatic attempted to do herself or others an injury. Her furniture had been quietly searched for arms, and her blinds nailed on the outside, without seemingly causing her any surprise or vexation.





CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PRESENCE OF DEATH.

AS it often happens to people who sleep badly, and who will assure you of a morning that they have not slept at all, I must have dozed a little that night unconsciously. On a sudden, in the darkness, I had a sense of coming to myself, and of straining blindly for a moment to think why it was that I felt such a gloomy recollection or such a fearful foreboding. Rapidly, instantly, the events of the day came back upon me, not separately and distinctly at first, but in a turbid mass, weighing upon me with a sense of almost physical pressure, and then sharply cleaving the temples of sleep, as the nail pierced the head of Sisera. I suppose that every man knows this feeling who has ever awakened to sorrows past or anxieties future.

I examined my watch by the momentary light of a lucifer, and found that it was but a little past one. Next, moved by mere restlessness or fantasy, I stole in my slippers to a window of the library, turned the venetians quietly, and looked out on that part of the garden which fronted the room of Mrs. Westervelt. No moon shone, but all the seraph stars let fall their loving light, and I could see that the blinds behind which the unhappy woman was secured were dark and close.

I sat there for fifteen minutes or more, revolving a troublesome perplexity of thoughts, not once changing my position.

not once withdrawing my absent-minded stare from the two nailed windows. Suddenly I had an idea, a consciousness, it could hardly be called a glimpse, of some moving form in the garden. I could not turn my head so quickly but that the object escaped me, or, rather, at the moment my glance caught it, seemed to resolve itself into a shadowy, motionless clump, which I knew to be a bush of oleanders. Still, something had moved there, had altogether changed place, had passed from point to point, I felt certain. It could not have been the swing of leafage nor the swaying of a shadow, for there was not wind enough to bend the stem of a lily, nor to raise a ripple on the Sound, which reflected the stars darkly but as unbrokenly as a steel mirror. I crouched down to the window-sill, fixed my eyes on the oleanders, watched and waited. Presently something like an arm rose with a quick, wary motion from behind the low mass, and I distinguished a soft rattle as of a handful of gravel tossed against a blind or the side of the house. Without asking myself the question, without reasoning the point, I decided that it was Somerville. What might be his object, or whether he would be likely to venture so near his foes at such an hour, I did not pause to consider, I felt so assured that it was he and no other.

I crept away from the window, determined to steal out there and spring upon him by surprise. Whether I should call Robert occurred to me, but I dreaded losing time; nor would I disturb Henry Van Leer, for fear that his simpleton of a wife might scream; nor Mr. Westervelt, because he was too feeble, if not too timid, for an encounter; and, finally, I felt myself to be a match for Somerville, alone. Through the deep hall which led to the rear of the house I slid, unlocked the door softly, and away on tiptoe along a curved shrubbery walk which I knew would take me to within a few yards of the oleanders. On coming in a line with the front of the wing I halted and glanced at Mrs. Westervelt's windows. Very considerable was my astonishment, and near akin to dismay when I saw one of her blinds broad open and

her form at the window leaning out, while Somerville stood below her, apparently beckoning and urging her to descend. Who broke or bent those stout nails, whether she or Somerville, I had not seen, and no one knows to this day. But what could this meeting mean? Was her confession a cheat, her insanity feigned, her subjection to this man willing, and this an elopement? I did not stop to ask, much less to answer.

They were so occupied with each other that I crept and crouched along unobserved until I reached a small arbor ambushed in lilacs, which stood between them and the gate, and, slipping behind one of the high-backed wooden seats, turned to watch them through the screen of leaves. Just then I heard a muffled sound, and saw by the dim starlight that Mrs. Westervelt had leaped to earth. Somerville seized her arm and drew her hurriedly down the straight path which led past my hiding-place, glancing backward repeatedly to see if they were observed. While I was preparing to spring out upon them they came softly, swiftly, speechlessly into the arbor, and halted so near me that I might have reached them with my hand and could plainly hear their quick breathing. A broad spray of lilac leaves overhung my face, so that they would not easily discover me, while I could see them with tolerable distinctness. Mrs. Westervelt had on a black silk and was dressed completely, except that her hair was loose and fell in thick, long twists over her shoulders and breast, giving a wild grace to her pale, dimly visible countenance.

"What have you told?" he whispered, clutching her arm with a harshness which left no doubt on my mind that he was capable of striking her.

"Nothing," she replied, leaning toward him with a fond, caressing movement. "But *you* told too much, my friend. You have ruined me."

She put her hand on his shoulder and looked up in his face. "Now I have no one left me in the world but you,"

she added. "Will you take me? Come, you have often said that you longed to kiss me,—to embrace me. You may do it now. I will take it as a pledge that you will be true to me."

I could not see her face at this moment, but her voice and manner were those of perfect sincerity. I could dimly see his face, and he evidently believed her. Looking her steadily in the eyes with an air half of wonder, half of fascination, he slid his arm around her waist and drew her softly to him, bending his head until his lips almost touched her cheek. At that moment, before the kiss was given, she struck him in the breast violently. I thought it was only with her hand, for I saw no weapon, but he gave a loud cry and sprang several feet in the air, falling face downward across the end of the bench behind which I was kneeling. She answered his shriek with another, as full of lunacy as his of death, and fled away, I did not see whither. I cannot say precisely what I did in that instant; I believe that I started up with both hands extended, seeking instinctively to prevent the blow which had already been stricken; and yet I knew that Somerville was dead, for I knew that nothing but death could produce such an effect. For once the man of the world had been fairly surprised.

My first distinct recollection is of lifting Somerville up, turning him and looking in his face as his head dropped backward over my arm. The next moment I heard voices, saw lights, and the family was around me.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Henry Van Leer. "Fitz Hugh, did you kill him?"

"No, no! Oh, it's incredible! it's incredible!" I stammered.

They all stared at me horror-struck, thinking that I was the homicide; my position seemed to testify it, and there was blood on my hands, my face, and my clothes.

"It's awful," said Henry Van Leer; "but it's right. You served him right, Fitz Hugh."

“Oh, my God, sir!” groaned Mr. Westervelt. “I am afraid you have brought yourself into trouble.”

“It was not I, I tell you. It was ——” and then I recollected that it was his wife. It would not do, however, to risk hanging or State’s prison merely to save the name of a crazy woman; and so, after staring at him one moment, as if to ask whether he had strength to bear it, I pointed to the open window. They all looked, and then exclaimed with one voice, “Oh! did *she* do it? Oh! it is impossible.”

In a dozen words I told them the revenge and the flight of Mrs. Westervelt.

“Oh, God have mercy upon us!” cried her husband. “Now it must all be known.”

“But she was mad, father; she did not know what she did,” said Mary, not, perhaps, fully understanding him.

“Oh! what shall be done! what shall be done!” he moaned. “Let us bury him! Let us bury him quick!”

“Bury him?” I cried; “and have the body discovered, and be charged with murder? You are as mad as she. No, no! Carry him into the house; send for the Rockford sheriff; tell the whole truth at once. Now, then, help me, will you? you Van Leers!”

We soon had the murdered man laid on an oil-cloth in that very library, where, the morning before, he had stood so full of insolence and wickedness. We felt for his pulse, but it was extinct, and his face had already lost the hue of life. All of us started back with renewed horror as the light of the lamps fell on his person; for, standing in his breast, standing in his very heart, was the dagger referred to in the confession. Robert was about to pull it out, but I caught his arm, saying, “Leave it there!”

“Now, Henry Van Leer,” said I, “ride over to Rockford, and let the authorities know at once what has happened. The rest of us will look for Mrs. Westervelt.”

I was perfectly cool again, and glanced at my watch with as distinct a consciousness of what time was as I ever had in

my life. We got two lanterns from the stables; rummaged every nook of the garden and grounds; descended the hill, still searching, and awakened the Treats; sent Ma Treat up to attend Mrs. Van Leer, who was in hysterics; and, assisted by Pa Treat, examined the shore and the banks of the creek. Two hours we wandered hither and thither fruitlessly, until the lanterns grew dim in the wide, soft luminousness of daybreak. Not a trace had been found as yet; not a fragment of woman's drapery; not a footprint along the humid beach; but we had often been beguiled into fruitless chases; forms had flitted toward us through the gloom and vanished suddenly; stumps of trees had put on the shape of humanity for a delusive moment; we had separated, and then pursued each other with breathless haste and calling; and at last we sat down by the whispering shore, wearied out of all strength and hope. Mary and Genevieve had successively joined us, and, finally, Mrs. Van Leer, walking in the strength of Ma Treat. There were also several stragglers from Rockford, full of sympathy, curiosity, incredulity, and horror.

"It's a darned likely story,—a woman killin' a man!" I heard one of these persons observe.

"But she's run away," remarked another. "What'd she run for if she didn't do it?"

"W—al," drawled the first speaker, as if he would have said, "I acknowledge that I am puzzled, but I beg the public to suspend its judgment until I can consider the subject further."

"I tell you what,—these rich, fash'nable people are just 's chuck full of vice and crime 's they can be, only they hardl' ever let it out," moralized a third individual.

"I say, let's go up and have another look at the dead man," resumed the first speaker. "I'm bound to see whether a woman could done that or not."

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; and so several of our Rockford friends hurried off to stare at the

corpse which had been found ; leaving us to care as we could for the lunatic who was still unaccounted for.

“ I say ! ” exclaimed Pa Treat suddenly. “ I’ll row up the creek.”

He ran down to the beach and pushed a boat off. Mr. Westervelt and I leaped in as it floated ; and Pa Treat, placing himself in the stern, sculled slowly away. It was a quarter of a mile to the mouth of the sluggish black streamlet where the cutter of the Van Leers and the two or three sharpes which constituted the marine of the neighborhood lay moored. Mr. Westervelt and I, leaning over opposite sides of the boat, sought to peer into the depths of the tranquil sea-water, gray, vague, and cloudy under the wan light of dawn. On reaching the creek, Pa Treat slackened his speed until the bow scarcely raised a bubble as it gently pushed aside the smooth, long, curving ripples. Backward and forward, in zigzags, we glided from bank to bank, advancing up the stream fruitlessly, until we had nearly slid into the shadow of a low shaky footbridge which spanned it. “ Stop ! ” I shouted ; the oar-blade gurgled in the water ; the boat halted like a poising bird. There, in the calmness of the gloomy bottom, dimly discernible, was a white face turned heavenward, two ghastly hands lifted as if in prayer, and a black, slowly swaying mass of woman’s garments.

“ Stop, Square ! ” shouted Pa Treat, laying hold of Mr. Westervelt, who, notwithstanding that he could not swim, seemed about to fling himself overboard. “ I’ll bring her up. There may be life in her yet.”

Without another word the old man threw off his hat, closed his hands above his head, and plunged straight to the bottom. In a few seconds he reappeared a dozen feet astern, swimming with one muscular arm, and bearing on the other the body of Mrs. Westervelt, her long wet hair streaming back from his shoulder. I lifted her in, and Mr. Westervelt seized her in his arms, calling and kissing her wildly.

“ Row away ! don’t lose time ! ” cried Pa Treat, and struck out strongly for the bank.

We spent two wretched, weary hours over the form of the unhappy woman, using every possible means of resuscitation, only to make sure that the silent water had done a work that was eternal. She had escaped from her griefs, her shame, and her madness; and it was mercy, doubtless, that we could not bring her back to them.

Acknowledging at last, with a feeble moaning, that she was no longer his, but death's, her husband consented that she should be laid out; and it was done in her bedroom, the blinds being closed again now, but no need more of nailing.

“ Her hands were folded on her breast,
There was no other thing exprest
But long disquiet merged in rest.”

Looking on her tranquil, mild face, softened into that child-like meekness which sleep often gives and death almost always, it was nearly impossible to believe, although we knew it, that she had lived a miserable forger and died a crazed murderess. In truth, when we came to think of her nature and history, it seemed as if her sinless countenance bore a true witness, and she was not chargeable with a title of the crime which her hands had committed. Her first guilt had been accomplished unknowingly; her last and greatest in the blindness of groping unreason. It appeared as if destiny had ordained her to be the victim of the wicked man who lay lifeless near her, and had relentlessly blasted all her prospects of happiness in life by means of him, solely that in the madness of her death she might become his punisher. Meantime Somerville had been stretched on a settee in the drawing-room, where a large pier-glass reflected his pallid face with a ghastliness beyond nature. There they lay then, in perfect rest, in the terrible amity of death, the two who had slain each other. It was fearful to pass from room to room and see the house so inhabited; it seemed as if death had gained the upper hands of life, and as if the world were but a place to be miserable and to perish in.

A justice had been on the ground since daybreak, examin-

ing localities, putting questions and entertaining surmises. Squire Bradley was a gentleman of good Rockford family, civil, slow-spoken, gray-haired, with a pear-shaped body, and a spacious physiognomy, of which the prevailing features were a portly Roman nose and a voluminous double chin. He was a sensible, well-intentioned person, I believe, but his soul was inconveniently overweighted with body and required long resting spells between ideas. From the general drift of his sparse and scant remarks, I inferred that he felt it to be his duty to arrest somebody. Doubt and mental shortness of breath troubled him again when he proceeded to decide upon the guilty one; but at last I had the annoyance of seeing that I had fallen under the suspicions of this amiable and conservative gentleman.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh, I believe, sir?" said he, approaching me with a smile in which disgust at my moustache was visible. "You saw the blow struck, I hear."

Myself. "I did, sir. I was almost within reach of her arm."

The Squire. (Arching his eyebrows.) "Oh, indeed! Bless me! Did the man fall immediately?"

Myself. "Instantly. Gave one leap and was a corpse."

The Squire. (Drawing back a step.) "Shocking! Bless my soul! Ahem, fall anywhere near *you*, sir?"

Myself. "Quite near. I thought he touched me as he dropped."

The Squire. (Looking me fixedly in the eye.) "Ah! very likely. Little blood on your clothes, I see."

He now retreated and stood silent a few seconds unbending his mind. Presently he was approached by a raw-boned, sandy-haired, squint-eyed man, of intemperate aspect and odor, whose face I had never noticed before, but whose voice I instantly recognized. "That's a darned likely story, Square, — a woman killin' a man."

The Squire. (Fingering his double chin doubtfully.) "Think so, Mr. Bunnel?"

Bunnel. (Scornfully elevating his single chin.) No sir! I jest don't."

The Squire. "By the way, what is your opinion, Mr. Bunnel?"

Bunnel. (Turning his eye at full cock upon me.) "Square, I can't abide mustachers." (The rascal had a shabby red beard of three days' growth.) "Where there's mustachers, there's the devil. Square, no woman could struck such a blow."

The Squire. "Possible! Well?—Oh, I see. So you think—eh?"

What more Mr. Bunnel thought did not reach me, for he whispered it in a closely confidential way which must have been very offensive to the Justice's olfactories; indeed, I saw the latter take a bit of flag-root or calamus out of his vest-pocket and slip it into his mouth as if to counteract the vile perfumes which invaded his respectable countenance. Presently he began to back away, while Bunnel followed him up, venting upon him that rich respiration, worth three cents a breath surely, at the lowest price of alcohol. The Justice escaped at last, and advanced once more upon me.

"Was Mrs. Westervelt a strong, muscular woman, Mr. Fitz Hugh?"

Myself. "Quite the contrary. Most people become strong, however, during a paroxysm of lunacy."

The Squire. (Chewing his flag-root between phrases; one bite for a comma, &c.) "Exactly. Thing is to prove the lunacy. Found any blood on *her* clothes, Mr. Fitz Hugh?"

Myself. "I have not, really. If any reached her the water must have soaked it out."

The Squire. "Possible. Worth considering. So you were watching them?"

Myself. "Yes, I intended to prevent the escape of Mrs. Westervelt."

The Squire. "Just so, of course. But that might have led you into a fight with Mr.—Mr. Somerville, eh?"

Here he abruptly retired and gave himself another interval of mental repose. We had several such conversations, the result of which, I believe, was to fix the Squire in the opinion that some of us, probably myself, had murdered Somerville and then drowned Mrs. Westervelt, after the fashion of Turkish and Italian vengeances.

All this while the house was encumbered with a crowd which increased momentarily; and in consequence, the Westervelts, father and children, as well as Mrs. Van Leer, shut themselves away up stairs. Ma Treat went from room to room, persistently urging tea, &c., quoting the Bible with references after her custom, and doing her quaint best to inspire thoughts of comfort. Mrs. Van Leer had repeated fainting fits and hysterics, and Genevieve sobbed or wrung her hands almost uninterruptedly, while Mary wept at times also, but for the most part remained firm and self-collected, troubled by grief indeed, but not by unreasoning terror. Such is the story that I afterward got from Ma Treat, who could not sufficiently praise the meek, tearful fortitude of our favorite, our darling.

Willie Westervelt stayed in a separate room with his nurse and Johnny Treat, playing gayly all the while, for though he had been told something of the night's horrors, he had not comprehended the story. "Let him be," whispered the crying Bridget; "he'll understand enough when he sees the poor mother."

It was about ten o'clock, when Squire Bradley addressed me for the twentieth time. "Mr. Fitz Hugh,—you seem to have charge of things here,—let me introduce you to our coroner, Mr. Capers."

Our mild friend shook hands with me mournfully, and hoped that I was well.

"I suppose the jury may as well sit now," continued the Squire. "First,—well, hadn't we better take Mr. Somerville first? Don't you think so, Mr. Capers? So I should say. This way, if you please, gentlemen."

But the inquest will add nothing to what we know, and so let us pass over it.

I will only mention one particular, of breathless interest to myself, if not of vital importance. Mr. Bunnell's opinion that where there's mustachers there's the devil, had spread widely; and all those anxious, silent people who crowded the room gazed at me as earnestly as at the dead. Every question that was put me seemed to say, Thou art the man! Once or twice, also, I overheard an unpleasant whisper in the press about "the bad look of the tall fellow," an appellation which I more than suspected was meant for myself. At last Mr. Westervelt awakened, as out of a trance, to the meaning of the scene, he rushed away with a wild air, and returned bringing the confession of his wife, which he thrust into the coroner's hand, saying, "Read that." It was read aloud, and suspicion fell from off me, like rent manacles. The Justice gazed at me apologetically; the coroner almost smiled with pleasure; the whisperings behind me changed to friendliness; the "tall fellow" had become good-looking.

The verdicts returned were, in substance:—Somerville, death by the hand of Mrs. Westervelt:—Mrs. Westervelt, suicide resulting from insanity. The jury broke up, the crowd gradually quitted the rooms, and we were left in peace! with our dead.

I had already telegraphed to the father of Somerville. Mrs. Van Leer, hysterical as she was, controlled her mind sufficiently to remember his address the instant that I demanded it. Had she been on her death-bed, I believe that she could have conversed quite rationally and comfortably on the subject of Fifth Avenue; and the Somervilles were a grade above Fifth Avenue, having been rich, martial, official and renowned, long before the birth of our parvenu republic. It was a Hudson River family, dating from the times of that Duke of York who subdued Peter Stuyvesant and left his own ugly name to the city of the island of Manhattan. Mrs. Van Leer took an evident pleasure in explaining to me that

Mr. Somerville, senior, lived in New York during the winter, and on his estates near Albany during the summer. She had talked with him at Saratoga; "dear, charming old gentleman; wish you *could* know him, Mr. Fitz Hugh."

I sent him two telegraphs, one to each of his residences, informing him that his son was at the point of death, and requesting his immediate presence at Seacliff. About three in the afternoon a Rockford hack drove furiously up to the gate, and a tall, thin elderly gentleman stepped out of it and hastened toward the house. A resemblance between him and the dead man within induced me to hasten to meet him. The resemblance was indeed striking; not in form, for he was taller and slenderer than Somerville; not in expression, for his was benign, though sad and firm; but in feature he had the same Greek beauty, high and delicate; the selfsame eye, too, dark-gray, commanding and full of light.

"Is this Mr. Somerville?" I asked, with a hope that it was not, for I dreaded the interview.

"Yes," he said, extending his hand with a grave courtesy, which in such a princely old man seemed benign condescension. "Mr. Fitz Hugh, I presume. How is my son?"

I shook my head without speaking, for it seemed best to utter no word.

"What! gone?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that? Oh! is it possible!" Then, after a pause, "You must be kind enough to show me to him."

"Stop," said I. "The circumstances were painful. I must prepare you before you go in there. There is another corpse in the house; there is grief here beside yours. Your son was stabbed to the heart."

"God have mercy upon him!" he groaned, and was silent for a moment.—"A rencontre?" he asked presently. "Did he kill this other person?"

"I will tell you,—I will tell you. Come this way, aside from these people. You had better hear all before you go in."

He followed me into one of the garden arbors, and sat down, evidently unable to stand.

"What I have to say is very wretched," I began. "You will hardly believe such things of him as I have to tell you."

He put up his hand, but it was in deprecation and not in denial. "I know,—I know," he said. "Perhaps I understand. Frank has done this family some great wrong, and there has been a terrible vengeance."

"Yes; a great wrong and a terrible vengeance. Mr. Semerville, by some means which will perhaps be explained to you, placed the wife of Mr. Westervelt here in his power. He abused that power terribly." (The father bowed a woful assent, as if he knew what his son was capable of doing.) "He abused it to such an unendurable extent that at last he drove her mad. She killed him in her lunacy, and then took her own life."

"Oh, my God, have mercy upon him! have pity upon me!" he moaned, starting to his feet and turning his face from me. After some moments he looked at me again, his dark-gray eyes wet, and a tear on his wrinkled cheek.

"I have long feared an evil end for Frank,—but nothing like this," he said,—"nothing like this! I knew his life,—knew that he deserved punishment,—but I did not expect this."

A little while more of silence, and then he added in a more subdued tone, "Will you now be pleased to lead me to him? I shall know how to conduct myself. You did well to make me these explanations, and I thank you. The duty must have been painful to you."

"You will hardly think of seeing any one of the family?" I asked as we moved toward the house.

"Certainly not. It would be distressing to them and to me. You will tell them of my great grief at the harm which one of my blood has done to them, will you not? See them? oh no! I only wish to take away my boy. Are there any obstacles to that?—any legal forms still to be complied with?"

“None. The inquest has been held. I will bring the coroner to you after a while, if you wish it.”

“If you please,” he said, with that regal amenity of his, so dignified and mild under all his grief; so habitual, so instinctive with him that no grief could overpower it for a moment. Doubtless he did not even know what gentle words he used, and what kind look he bore.

I led him to the darkened parlor and pointed within, but did not follow him; for who would have dared intrude on that meeting between the old man and his son?

He is one of nature's noblemen, I said to myself as I walked and waited in the garden. I had never seen him before, and our interview had not lasted ten minutes, yet I felt as if I had known him for years. It was partly his calm, sweet courtesy, so like in seeming to deep friendliness, which wrought this sense of intimacy, and partly that I had been forced to utter words which reached into the most hidden, most solemn depths of his soul. I revered and loved him already, as a good man striving to bear meekly an unmerited affliction. How like he was to his son! and yet as unlike as light to darkness; like him in exquisite grace and urbanity, like him in the natural gift of a noble person and port; yet in heart and life an utter, astonishing contrast. I am not talking at random when I speak thus of the character of the elder Somerville. Let his friends and neighbors, let the poor whom he succored, let those many who wept when he died, bear witness to what he was worth. His whole life after he reached the age of manhood, after he came into possession of the vast social influence attendant on wealth, was in shining contrariety to the life of his unhappy son. Frank's history but shows that money, an attractive person, and fascinating manners, without unflinching moral principle, form only an inheritance of temptation. It is the old old story, always disagreeable to hear, and always true. We love rather to be told of the dignity of humanity, of its invincibility, its godlike intelligence; and to believe that man could drive the very

chariot of Omnipotence, without, Acteon like, precipitating himself to ruin.

I believe that Somerville, senior, did his best to make Frank a worthy man, and to reclaim him after he had wandered into vice. His generosity was abused, his authority set at naught, his entreaties and monitions derided, his family name stained with debaucheries, and still he continued full of affectionate long-sufferance. It was not until Frank became a destroyer of innocence that he warned him for the last time, and then disinherited him. He would neither support nor own a son who was the enemy of womanly virtue. Yet his soul still went out after him with anxiety and yearning, as I had seen plainly in that moment when he learned the extinction of his hopes, the eternal bereavement of his heart. Perhaps he thought now that he had been too hard, and that forgiveness would have been a stronger saviour than justice. Such a feeling was instinctive and almost irrepressible. But just? Who can sound such a mystery? The human nature partakes of infinity, and one heart is not like another. For my part I believe that, no matter how the younger Somerville had been treated, he would have continued the same. He was one of those intelligent misdoers who choose the broad road with a full consciousness of its evil; one of those splendid sinners who shine and dazzle like fallen seraphs as they move through the blackness of darkness; and for such there is rarely passion of repentance, resolution of saintly change, redeeming persistence in goodness.

When Mr. Somerville came out to me, he was sad in face but tranquil in voice and manner.

"Will you present me now to the coroner?" he asked. "It will be proper that I should hear the story from him."

I led him into the library, where I had already seated Mr. Capers, and left them together. In half an hour he sought me out again, and signified that he should return immediately to Rockford to make preparations for carrying his son's body home.

"You may think it strange that no one came with me," he said. "I have only a daughter left, and she is now abroad."

No other son! The last of the name! The heart knoweth its own bitterness; but how can it understand the bitterness of another?

I offered no reply except to beg that he would let me attend to the arrangements at Rockford. He thanked me, but declined, and, touching his hat, hastened back to his carriage. In an hour he reappeared, followed by a hearse containing a coffin, which he had found ready made in the shop of the Rockford undertaker. The Van Leers and I laid Somerville in the narrow case and lifted it into the hearse. He was dressed in his ordinary morning suit, his white hands folded across his full chest, and his face wonderfully handsome still, though the clear eyes were closed and the healthy cheeks faded. We removed our hats, almost unconsciously, for the mystery of death, no matter in whom incarnated, has a venerable sanctity.

The bereaved father seemed affected by this conduct in men, who, as he well knew, had reason to curse the name of Somerville. "Gentlemen, you are very kind," said he. "I thank you, and hope we shall meet again. There is a better world than this. God bless you!"

Henry Van Leer looked very serious, and there was a dimness in Robert's eyes.

"What a good old man!" said the latter, when the hearse had passed beyond the gate. "Oh, Fitz Hugh! what a different place Seacliff would have been, if Somerville had been as good as his father!"

"Yes, indeed, Robert! By one man's sin death entered Seacliff, and all manner of shame and sorrow. But for Frank Somerville it might have been a quiet home, with no more of the troubles, and with more, perhaps, of the pleasures, than ordinarily flock around an American household. How he had turned weakness into wickedness, and made innocence miserable! What deceiving mists of hateful sus-

picious, what shattering, though invisible winds of rage and terror, what a cruel reality of unconcealable mischief, had his presence occasioned! When we thought of what he had done to torment us, who had never harmed him, it seemed as if he could hardly be human. Once more I recollected Dante's tale of Branca Doria, and of the demon who inhabited his body and bore his name and wore his clothes, working mischief on earth in his stead, for long after the human spirit of Doria had gone to his own place.

But he had departed now, body and spirit; and it seemed as if the light shone freer through our windows. He had not done all the mischief that he intended; he had not sundered two hearts that Love had joined together; he had the will for it and perhaps the cunning, but not the time. That evening, finding myself by chance alone in the parlor with Mary, I unreflectingly broke out with an exclamation of pleasure that that terrible corpse had taken its shadow off our floor. "It seemed to gloom the whole house," I said; "it filled it with a sense of crime as distinct as the smell of blood;—I felt as if it were perpetually interposing between me and you. And yet it does not."

"It *does*," she replied. "It *is* between us. Mr. Fitz Hugh, you must give me up now. Did I not tell you so? You *may* do it, and you *must*."

"I will wait, Mary," said I; "but not give you up."





CHAPTER XXXII.

FUNERAL.

AL L this while it is still the same long, long day. As I stood on the bluff with Robert, facing, but hardly seeing a sunset "which far outshone the wealth of Ormus or of Ind," it seemed as if weeks or even months had rushed vehemently away since that hour of murder and suicide. After every great calamity, every supreme anguish, there is a period when life is not properly measurable by the tickings of a clock, but only by the throbbings of emotion, which beat so cruelly that we can think of naught else, and so swiftly that they cannot be counted, and thus seem numberless. Then time spreads out into gigantic spaces, over which the troubled soul circles wearily, like a land-bird lost in mid-ocean.

"It's mighty odd that Westervelt, senior, don't come," Robert observed. "He was telegraphed to before daylight. If a son of mine was in such an awful muss, I should be along the first chance."

Five minutes after this we heard the far-away rumble, and saw the long trailing smoke of the evening train from New York; and in ten minutes more a hack appeared on the Rockford road, rolled across the plain at a gallop, labored up the hill, and halted at Seacliff. Mr. Westervelt and his children had seen it approaching, and were at the gate. Robert sprang forward, but a word from me checked him, and we

stood at a distance while the Westervelts walked sadly into the house, talking softly together, but not looking in each other's faces.

Half an hour afterwards, judging by the lights, that they were all up stairs, Robert and I ventured into the parlor. Westervelt, senior, was there alone, holding a roll of paper in his hand, and stamping up and down the room with the grim, granitic air of a funeral obelisk. He had evidently gone right to work upon the present emergency, after the fashion of a true business man, and made it his first duty to master the case by reading the confession of Mrs. Westervelt.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh!" said he, saluting me bluntly, and, as it were, angrily. Then, turning to Robert, "Who is your friend, sir?"

I presented a very respectful and humble-browed gentleman, Mr. Robert Van Leer.

"Oh—ah—yes," replied Westervelt, senior. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Van Leer. Remember seeing you now, sir, at my son's marriage with your cousin. Sir, I offer you my condolence. Your cousin's death is a shocking affair, to you and to us."

"Horrid, sir!" observed Robert, earnestly. "Awful thing, all the way through."

"Yes, sir. But there's one comfort. That Somerville has got his quietus,—got his deserts, sir."

"I have just finished reading your cousin's confession, sir," he added, holding up the manuscript, sternly. "I never heard of such a rascal as that in all my life. Why, sir, if he wasn't dead, I could have him kept in jail till he rotted. State's prison offences, sir!"

"That's a fact, sir," responded Robert. "I feel very sorry to think of poor Ellen. She had a dreadful hard life of it."

"Humph! All her own fault," observed the old man. "She shouldn't have defrauded you. By the way, we must see to that, at a proper time; yes, we must settle that."

"Oh! it's of no consequence," said Bob, eagerly. "We don't mind about that."

"But it *is* of consequence, begging your pardon, and I *do* mind about it," retorted Westervelt, senior. "However, another time,—another time. Mr. Fitz Hugh, can I see you alone, sir?"

At this hint Robert slid meekly out of the room, and left me to the old gentleman. He stood silent and absent-minded for some moments, as if the tragedy of the day had been sufficient to dissipate even his powers of concentration.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh, I want to know how we are to treat you," he at last said, or rather sighed. "You have been accepted into our family; but now the family name has been dishonored. You are not bound to hold to your engagement. My granddaughter, my son, and I,—we all absolve you. You are welcome to go, and we shall think no worse of you. Consider this, but decide as early as possible,—say this evening."

"I have already considered it and decided upon it," I replied. "My heart and will are just where they were. Nothing has happened, and it seems to me that nothing could happen to detach me from Miss Westervelt."

"Think well of it," said he, putting his hand on my arm gently and almost affectionately. "You have proud relatives and an old name,—if that counts for anything. Do you know what you are about? The murder and the suicide are in the papers to-day; the swindle will be in them to-morrow. There will be all sorts of shameful suspicions and exaggerations. The name of Westervelt will become a byword. We shall see men's fingers pointing at us everywhere; we shall hear people whispering about us; we shall be notorious." (Here the old man's voice shook a little, and he had to reinforce it with a hem.) "The mere fact that such a fellow as Somerville has stayed so much in the family, may be enough to blacken the fame of our girls. Their guilty mother-in-law will haunt them like a ghost. Do you wish to marry into such a family? Think before you answer."

"Mr. Westervelt, I assure you that I have thought it all over, seriously and calmly," I replied. "I still wish to marry

Miss Westervelt; wish it as much as ever I did, and more! I will wait for her, but I must have her."

After looking in my face for a long time, as if to see whether there was any shade of doubt or deception there, he took my hand and shook it warmly.

"I thank you," said he;—"I do thank you earnestly. I am glad to find some strength in you,—some true devotion. I take this as a kindness, not to my granddaughter alone, but also to myself. I am personally obliged to you."

"This affair cuts me up terribly," he continued, after a moment's silence. "I can't bear to see my family an object of scorn;—set up, as it were, in the pillory, for every scandal-monger to throw his rotten eggs at." (His trumpet of a voice again missed a note here, and he got it back to its sonorous natural pitch with difficulty.) "I made the name respectable, and I wanted it kept so. Now this rascal of a Somerville, and this simpleton of a Mrs. Van Leer Westervelt, have blacked it for a whole generation. What under the heavens God makes knaves and fools for is beyond me to imagine. It appears to me a miserable investment of flesh and spirit. Well, we must take life as we find it, and fight through as we can. It seems to me like a wearisome, unprofitable, disappointing business now, notwithstanding that I am what the world calls a successful man."

Was it not really touching, this sigh of a millionaire? Stocks, bonds, granite blocks, city lots, Western lands, two thousand ton clippers, and all the other architecture of gigantic wealth had been for the moment dissipated into thin air by one blow of a feeble-minded woman. The rich man had learned that he could build no sure refuge from calamity; and the discovery humiliated him with a sense of impoverishment difficult to bear.

"Stay here a moment," he observed presently. "I'll bring my wife down to see you."

When he reëntered, it was with his usual positive, self-confident manner, as if he had been brushing up his courage

for the benefit of the timid natures up stairs. Mrs. Westervelt followed him softly, her meek, white face meeker and whiter than ever, and her eyelids red with weeping. I presume that her husband had informed her of our conversation concerning the marriage, for she came to meet me eagerly and shook both my hands with affectionate earnestness.

"Oh, how dreadful this is, Mr. Fitz Hugh!" she whispered. "We feel almost crushed by it."

"Pooh, nonsense! wife. We are not crushed so easily," shouted her husband after the old boastful fashion. "I should like to know who would dare try to crush us."

"It isn't other people I care for," sighed Mrs. Westervelt. "Did you think we should never come to you?" she asked, turning to me. "We have been away, and got home only this afternoon. We received your message at the door, and came up by the next train. What do you think of my poor son? Will he be able to bear it?"

"I have hardly spoken with him to-day," I replied. "He has his children."

"Oh, yes! Dear children! What would he do without them! Well, I must go back and sit with him. I can't bear to leave him alone now, you know. We have left him alone too much of his life already."

Out of the room and up stairs she stole, with a step as quick and soft as a girl's.

"Yes, she's right," muttered Mr. Westervelt, after he had walked up and down two or three times. "We have left him alone too much. It's not my wife's fault.—Mine!—Mr. Fitz Hugh, if you ever have a son and he disappoints you, don't get out of patience with him. We must have patience in this world. It seems late at eighty to be learning such a simple lesson as that; but I am only just learning it."

Is there any more pleasant and improving spectacle than that of a man, who, having passed great part of his life in bullying other people, at last finds himself bullied by his own

conscience? The sight is not a common one, I admit; but it pleases Heaven to exhibit it occasionally; about once, perhaps, in an angel's visit.

At last and at last this weary day ended. I had scarcely slept for more than forty hours, and the first touch of the pillow threw me into a heavy, painful slumber. It was luxury compared with our woful waking life, and I fairly spited the morning light because it brought with it recollection and anticipation.

That day we were to bury the wife, the mother, the suicide. Westervelt, senior, who, from the moment of his arrival, directed everything, had arranged that we should leave Rockford in the eleven o'clock train, reach New York at half-past twelve, take carriages and drive directly to Greenwood Cemetery. The grave, the hearse, the coaches, the clergyman, had all been ordered the previous evening by telegraph. The old business man attended to everything, and saw the entire programme carried out as accurately and punctually as he would have delivered a consignment from one of his clippers. At the New York station we were joined by his two married daughters and their husbands. It was half-past two when our hearse and its following of four coaches halted beside the conspicuous grassy knoll in Greenwood which awaited the coming of all the Westervelts.

"I won't have a vault," the Senior had said to me in the cars. "Vaults are absurd, sir. I prefer the good old way."

There was neither monument nor headstone on the knoll, but a far mournfuller object, something with no beauty nor resignation in it, the pile of fresh earth which flanks a new-made grave, and in the summit of it two spades standing awry. All about this harsh deformity, in sweet contrast with it, the grass was daintily green, loyal still to the bygone summer. Here and there tufts of dwarf pine; here and there the waxen gleam of snowdrops; here and there a mountain ash, throwing out its sprays of crimson. Over all, high in the

September wind, which blew with a faint whisper as of talking waves from the southern ocean, two hemlocks sighed and a noble elm waved its long garments of shadow.

As we halted, two men, evidently the sexton and his assistant, left the grave and came to open the gate of the enclosure. One carriage was there before us, and a clergyman in a gown now descended from it. Beside these three and the fourteen who composed our party of mourners, the drivers and two of the Westervelt servants, no one was present. Better thus, far better than to be attended by a curious and scandalized multitude, struggling to obtain a view of the poor suicide's cold face, and prating to each other in loud whispers of the forgery which she had consented to, of the murder which her small hand had done, and of the foul suspicions which stained, so unjustly, her matronly name.

The coffin was borne to the grave-side by the sextons and the two old waiting-men of Westervelt, senior. The husband followed, supporting Genevieve and leading Willie; then Mary, leaning on my arm, and then the Van Leers; lastly the Westervelts of New York. The clergyman performed his office with a sad and almost stern conscientiousness. The service was brief and painful; no pious assurance nor consolation; no blessed hope of a sinless resurrection; but a mournful surrendry as to uncovenanted mercies; a tearful plea for pity on the afflicted; and then dust to dust; ashes to ashes.

Willie Westervelt held his father's hand, wonderingly observant of the grief in all these loved faces, constrained out of his childish gayety by it, but evidently not fully aware of its meaning. It was the first time that he had ever looked upon the strong tranquillity of death, and he had no conception of its unflagging, pitiless endurance; he perhaps expected that his mother would soon open her eyes from that strange sleep, rise out of the coffin, kiss away his uneasiness, fondle him as of old, and go back with him to Seacliff. Over and over he looked up into the dim sorrow of his father's eyes,

with a faint smile, half questioning, half encouraging, which changed nature and grew piteously tremulous as the ceremony verged towards its end, and the gloom of it chilled more sensibly through him. At last, when he saw the coffin let down into the earth and left there, when he heard the first cruel crash of gravel on the hollow-voiced lid, the whole meaning of the scene, all the completeness and eternity of his loss, seemed to burst upon him. With a loud cry he desperately caught his father's hand and dragged him forward to the brink of the grave. He did not say a word, but his eyes and one little outstretched, imploring hand pleaded for his mother. Then, seeing that there was no hope, and that his father either could not or dared not prevent that horrible deed, he burst into violent sobs, and, rushing back to Mary, hid his face in the folds of her dress. Through her the sobs re-echoed; through all of us, even to the coldest.

The burial was over. The sepulchral knoll had received into its bosom the first Westervelt. The shadows of the elm were to be no more withdrawn from her until it should fall, and the mourning hemlocks were to sing as long as they lived over her last slumber. Winter drifts, young grasses of spring, summer rains, dead leaves of autumn, were henceforth to be her visitants, clothing her abode with what beauty God giveth them, and saying forever above her in voices audible to all gentle spirits, "Compassion! Peace!"

As we passed out of the cemetery another funeral procession met us, and through the window of the first carriage we saw the noble, mournful face of the last of the Somervilles. We shrank back, though he did not look up: he was gazing steadily down, as into a grave: there was a dead man who stood between him and all the living. We passed each other, going opposite ways, never more to meet, but shadowed by the same calamity.

Through the quiet of Brooklyn, through the thronged streets of New York, noisy with life, unconscious apparently of death, we drove as hurriedly as possible to the house of

Westervelt, senior. The New York relatives went to their own homes; our Van Leer friends to a hotel.

In the evening the elder Westervelt requested me to accompany him in a call on the two brothers, observing that there was a matter of business between him and them which ought to be settled without further delay. Arrived at the Everett House, we inquired for the Messrs. Van Leer, and were shown into a private parlor.

"Good evening, Mr. Westervelt. How d'y'e do, Fitz Hugh?" was their salutation.

"Very sorry my wife isn't able to see you," continued Henry. "This awful business, you know, has completely worsted her. She went straight to bed as soon as she got here."

"My compliments to her," said Mr. Westervelt. "I had no idea of troubling her, though; not a proper occasion. Gentlemen, I came to see *you*."

"Very happy, sir," observed both the brothers, politely, and bowing a little, as men ought to millions.

"About business," prosecuted Mr. Westervelt. "It's no time, I am aware, for ordinary operations; but this is an affair which demands immediate attention. I have a debt of honor and I must pay it, or I shan't sleep. Gentlemen, a person who once belonged to my family defrauded you out of sixty thousand dollars. I have calculated it at compound interest, seven per cent., as you will see by looking at this paper. Here are two checks which cover the total. Here, also, is a receipt. Will you be so good as to examine the checks and sign the receipt."

"Mr. Westervelt!" deprecated both the brothers, hanging back from the table on which the old man had successively laid the papers.

"If you want time to verify the accounts, I will give you till to-morrow noon," said the Senior. "I shall be ready to receive you at my office and settle the matter,—say at one o'clock precisely."

Henry looked perplexed, and was silent. Robert screwed up his courage and stammered out, "Why—Mr. Westervelt—the fact is—we'd made up our minds not to touch this—not the first red cent of it, sir. She was our cousin, and we was quite willing she should have it."

"Nonsense!" returned the old merchant, impatiently. "She cheated you out of the property. She was my son's wife, and he is indebted to you for it. You must take your own money, gentlemen; you must take your own money."

After an embarrassing discussion, in which the brothers showed as much generosity of soul as awkwardness of manner, they gave way before Mr. Westervelt's Quincy granite steadiness.

"Well," said Henry, "I suppose we must take it. It's of no great account to us, but it's a good deal less to you; and, since you insist upon it, why I suppose Bob and I must take it. We did want to show that we had a kind feeling towards poor Nelly's husband and child. But you won't let us. So, Mr. Westervelt, there's my name. Now, Bob."

Robert added his clumsy signature to his brother's, and Mr. Westervelt stowed the receipt away in his gigantic pocket-book.

"Won't you take a glass of wine?" asked Henry. "Sorry I didn't think of it before. You must be dead beat out, sir."

"No, thank you; no occasion," responded Mr. Westervelt, bracing himself up very stiffly, as if to show that he was not in the least beat out. "I must go back to my family. My respects to Mrs. Van Leer; hope to see her better soon. Good-evening, gentlemen."

"What a h—ll of an upper lip the old cock has!" I heard Henry Van Leer remark as I followed the senior out of the room. Let not my good readers, my best readers, be angry with the poor man for using this comprehensive word which I have dared to only half spell; let them lay the sin, not to the wickedness of his heart, but to the incompleteness

of his vocabulary, which was very often inadequate to his conversational necessities. Had he known how to analyze the character of Westervelt, senior, in clear decent English, he would not have been reduced to swear.

“There!” exclaimed Mr. Westervelt, when we had got into the street. “I’ve paid up that family. I’ve seen the last of it, I hope. Now sir,” (taking my arm as fiercely as if he were going to garrote me,) “I wan’t to tell you my plans. I shan’t bully my son any more; he can’t stand it now; and I’m sick of it. I shall support him out of my own pocket liberally, and settle a hundred thousand on his children. Mary will take her third immediately. That will make something over sixty thousand between you and her. Don’t you lose it, sir! If you do,” (here he swelled indignantly)—“if you do” (here he suddenly collapsed)—“you ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir!”

He had been about to bully me, to threaten me with starvation, I suppose, in case I lost my property; but the remembrance of his son, of the ill effects of bullying in that instance, and of all the sorrowful mystery now just terminated, had come across him; and so his blustering intentions wilted into a very harmless affirmation indeed.

The next day a hundred or two thousand of New Yorkers breakfasted on our family horrors. It is not generally observed what a large proportion of our population, even in the most educated and Christian places, where the school-master is abroad and the minister speaks with authority, is composed of jackals and hyenas, highly respectable, to be sure, but body-snatching. In truth I am afraid that the gentlest of us have something vampyric in our nature, and can occasionally make a meal off a freshly killed corpse with excellent relish. How we did enjoy Dr. Parkman and Dr. Burdell, even weeks and months after they had been in their graves! The “Seacliff tragedy” furnished columns of copy to the morning papers; every hungry editor rushed in for his morsel, to cook it up into a savory leader; and it was

understood that all the illustrated journals would, as soon as possible, gratify the public palate with drawings of the site and the scene. One flight of vultures and buzzards scented out the two graves in Greenwood, while another spread stronger wings and snuffed the blood-tainted air of our forsaken dwelling. In the streets newsboys cried the "Somerville murder;" in the hotels every drummer treated his southern or western victim to it; in the saloons the hostess served her visitors with "the particulars."

Any place at such a time was a refuge compared with the immense publicity of New York; and we hurried back to our blood-stained, crime-stained, but isolated and tranquil home of Seacliff. It was evening when we reached it; not a soul was moving in the grounds; the lower masses of the house were hung with palls of shadow; the upper windows, free from foliage, were spectrally alight with moonbeams; fearful was the silence, the loneliness, the recollection. How different, how opposite, had Seacliff become to what it was when I first knew it! How had the wickedness of one man, and he not of us, blighted for us all memory, all anticipation, and made our little world a fallen one!

We tried to nestle into our home and warm it into something like comfort; but the house had been chilled utterly, incurably, by the presence of those two corpses; worse still, they themselves were there, and could not by any means be got away. We had carried them out with our own hands, and seen them depart for distant graves; but they had returned again, and we beheld them daily in the hall, in the library, in the parlor. They infected every room with the effluvium of death just as truly and as insupportably as if they had physically mouldered away there, and tainted the atmosphere and spotted the boards and walls with their corruption. How could we live in a house poisoned with such a body of death and sin!

The Van Leer brothers came up and passed a day, but only to collect and carry off their luggage.

“It’s awful here, isn’t it?” Henry said to me. “My wife hasn’t got over it yet. She wouldn’t come up, not even to try and comfort the girls. She begun to cry just as soon as I urged it. Good-bye, Fitz Hugh. I guess we’ve looked our last on Seacliff.”

The following day Westervelt, senior, paid us a visit, saw the corpses perhaps, and took pity on us.

“You can’t stay here,” he said. “New York is better than this. I’ll take you all,—I mean all you children,—into my own house. As for Mr. Fitz Hugh, he must shift for himself;—that is, Mary, till he goes to housekeeping.”

And so we all fled the spot forever; the Westervelts going to the great house in St. Joseph’s Place; and I to the hotel the most adjacent thereto.

“Good-bye, Lewy,” sighed Ma Treat, as she made bold to kiss me privately. “I did hope that when you married Mary, you would come and live along side of us. I ’spose I must give that up now. This splendid house has got to be too awful; something between a prison and a grave, like. Verily, the wages of sin is death: Romans sixth, twenty-first. Well, good-bye, Lewy. Pa Treat and I will always pray for you and for Mary and for all of them. We never shall forget you; nor Johnny won’t either. Good-bye.”

The tears rolled down her old cheeks and dropped unobstructed on the fresh calico gown which she had put on for the occasion. She joined Pa Treat and Johnny, standing in silent woe; and they waved their hands to us, as if in benediction, till we were out of sight.

“I feel anxious about my son, sir,” the elder Westervelt soon confided to me. “I’m afraid of a decline. He wants occupation, to divert his mind from these awful affairs, sir. I shall take him into my office, give him some little responsibility—nothing severe, nothing *very* important, you understand—allow him the run of the books and let him do the best he can.”

The old man evidently thought that he was extending a

great favor, which nothing would have justified but the absolute need that his son stood in of indulgences. I have little doubt also that Westervelt, junior, was of the same opinion. His father had achieved power as a man of business, a great operator; and he had been ambitious all his life to reach a similar position of splendor and influence, by the same means; for to him, bred into an early respect for business, the Exchange seemed the most attractive and noble arena open to genius. It was free to him now; he could strive in it with a cestus as weighty as any one's; and doubtless he found some pleasure in the battle, some forgetfulness of past sorrows.

But a wounded heart fights no long battle, if it abides in a sickly body. Before the winter was over, that immortal chariot which comes at last to every mortal dwelling, halted at the door, and that still small voice which will not be disobeyed, nor suffer any delay, called to the millionaire, Bring out your dead! Then the earth of the Greenwood knoll, now frozen, was opened again, and the shadow of the funeral elm, now leafless, crossed the grave of the younger Westervelt.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

TWO YEARS AFTER.

IT is the opinion of certain wise philosophers that the happiest month of human life, whether manly or womanly, is the month which immediately follows marriage. The first philosopher who is supposed to have discovered this great and delectable fact was our primal ancestor Adam; and it is said in learned circles that he arrived at it, not by intuition, nor by a process of reasoning, nor by mathematical calculation, but by sweet experience. Since him innumerable multitudes of other physicists have made the experiment of matrimony and become converts to the honeymoon hypothesis. Thus the philosophers of this school have raised up, and in point of fact, propagated disciples, until it is probable that no other scientific truth is so widely promulgated and so respectably supported as this blessed theory. Nor is it likely that it will ever lack proselytes until the last man, coming marriageable, finds himself without a last woman.

That it should be a happier month than any that has gone before it is to the credit of human nature. It speaks well for men and women both, that among the multitudinous enjoyments with which their beneficent Maker has crowded earth, they can find no benison so pure and complete as the right to love without restraint and to resign one's self utterly to the object of love. That it should in general be a happier month

than any that comes after it is a wise and kind dispensation. Excess of the sunlight of pleasure will scorch away strength; content, altogether self-contained and unbroken, will kill activity and thus usefulness. The Master of Life did not make us to be satisfied until we awake in his likeness.

As Mary and I had seen Europe, we took an American journey. Amid flocks of other brides and grooms we flew across New York to Niagara, went down the Rapids, saw Montreal and Quebec, climbed the White Mountains, and reached Saratoga. It is curious how easily you can pick out a bride from a crowd of other young women, married and unmarried. She is so blushing and meek and noiseless; she colors so violently when she meets an old acquaintance; she shows in her face such a sweet fear lest every stranger should suspect her secret; she looks so happy and so proud of her husband, yet so ashamed to have it seen; that, no matter how costumed, whether in white, brown or black, you detect her at a glance. "There goes another bride," we used to hear people say, until Mary got amusingly provoked, and wished that she had brought along her old dresses. She did not know, dear child! that there was a new light in her eyes, a halo of young wifehood on her face, which rayed out the fresh life of her soul so clearly that none gifted with human sympathy could misunderstand it. Have we not read that Moses, when he came down from the mount of mystery, was not aware that his face shone? To a modest woman marriage is a great, an almost terrible mystery, full of knowledge never before conceived and of emotions until then incredible.

At Saratoga we were joined by all the Westervelts, including Genevieve, who soon saw herself enthroned, whether she would or no, as the belle of the season. She was even handsomer now in the full bloom of nineteen than I had found her in the budding flush of seventeen. In manner and character, too, she was far sweeter; no longer positive, dictatorial, quick-tempered and impertinently sarcastic; but possessed of that most insinuating grace, that most useful talent of womanhood,

gentleness. The old corroding grievance which so long fretted her had suddenly changed into one of those crushing calamities which bow the will and make the heart soft.

She is still in society, more of a belle than ever ; and it is one of the questions of the day, we think, who shall have her ? I might name several who have tried their luck and failed, and who are not in the least angry about it, but more or less resolved to try it again, according to the usual spirit of rejected lovers. In the mean time my wife is constantly in arms, fighting off, first this one, then that one, in the honest belief that they are not half good enough for her sister. I charitably hope that she may find herself beaten one day, and see Genevieve captured by some true prince who was ordained of old to cut his way through her guarding enchantments and dragons, and bear her in triumph out of the Castle of Single Blessedness.

Robert is still in the market, one of the most marriageable of men, and as he imprudently confesses, dying for a wife. He is a great admirer of Mrs. Fitz Hugh, but could easily be brought to forsake her by the right kind of a girl ; who, I am persuaded, would find his heart sound and his two hundred thousand dollars well invested.

Before consigning Mrs. Van Leer to the oblivion of fashionable life, let us blow a penny trumpet in commemoration of her growth in the moral graces. I was pleased to observe at Saratoga that her conversation and deportment were by no means so gallant as they used to be at Seacliff. She was no more a she knight-errant in search of amorous adventures, offering battle to those dangerous giants and caitiffs commonly known as fast men, and running risk every day of being swooped upon by the wicked magician, Scandal. The change in her positively astonished me, for I had not supposed that she possessed sense enough to take warning from any experience, however terrible, unless it were her own. I do not know that her husband was much the happier for this reformation. He was not an exacting, suspicious man, and had

always, I believe, been pretty well satisfied with his wife, except during that spasm of fierce jealousy which came upon him in the hour when our Scacliff demon was unveiled. He loved his Jule stupidly, and had always loved her so, even while she was unworthy of it.

By the way, how completely had I been mistaken in this man and his brother as regarded the interest I should take in them and the sympathies we should have together! I thought at our first meeting that I should find little to note in them, because they were not handsome nor clever enough to be interesting, not ugly nor vicious enough to be picturesque; yet I had had to come into passionate contact with them, to watch their movements, to study their characters, and to acknowledge at times that Van Leer was a terrible name to me. Would it not have become so if *she* had consented to bear it? Depend upon it that every man has power in him which circumstances can bring out with effect memorable to some other man; that the weakest of us is Archimedes enough to move his earth whenever occasion gives him a proper stand-point.

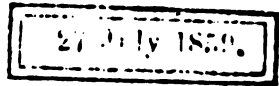
Mr. Hunter, I am sorry to say, has really become what he once emptily pretended to be, a dissipated character, and is as vain as ever of his vices, real and simulated. Whether he will reform or not is a question sufficiently doubtful to be almost interesting.

My wife! How shall I speak of her with worthy praise, yet with worthy reserve! Rousseau says that within two years after marriage a man does not care whether his wife is handsome or not; and the remark, absurd as it may appear to bachelors and maidens, has very little of exaggeration. Let it not be supposed that I consider her less perfect in form and feature than I did once. No; but now her beauty is of less consequence to me; other qualities of hers have shown themselves far more essential to my happiness; it is upon them that I have invariably found myself falling back for comfort when the world went hard; yes, it is her affection which has become altogether precious, always necessary;

her beauty of soul has made me forget that her person is lovely.

Well, I will have done. I shall not prate of her; she demands nothing but silence; she prefers to shine only in the quiet of my heart; there let her stay until it falls sweetly to dust.

THE END.





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